

A N

INQUIRY

CONCERNING

FAITH.

Πότε ἔν παρέσται ὁ χρόνος ἔτος; καὶ τίς ὁ
παιδέυων; ἤδιστα γὰρ ἂν μοι δοκῶ ἰδεῖν τῦτον
τὸν ἄνθρωπον τίς ἐστίν.

PLAT. Alcib. 2.

*Sed ut hoc pulcherrimum esse judicem. VERA
videre, sic pro veris probare. FALSA tur-
pissimum est.*

CIC. Academ.

L O N D O N :

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Y R I U O 7 I

СОКРАЩЕН

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PLAT. Acad. 2.

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A O D M O L



PREFACE.

THE following *Essay* proposes to examine the *Scripture-Doctrine* of Faith: to rescue it from the *Mistakes* of Believers, and the *Artifices* of Unbelievers: to invite the one to a free, the other to a sober Use of their *Faculties*: to prevail, if possible, on Both to renounce their respective *Prejudices*; and to recommend, as far as I may, the united *Aids* of Reason and Revelation. To pursue these *Points* particularly, and in the *Way* of direct Proof, would require more
Time

Time and Pains, and be less likely to take Effect. I have therefore applied my self to the Removal of Impediments, and the Solution of Difficulties: especially such Difficulties, as appear to have been chiefly instrumental in retarding the Progress of Christian Knowledge.——In what Method this Design is pursued, will sufficiently appear from the Introduction. At present I would only make a preliminary Observation on a Point nearly related to the Subject before us.

I T seems of late a prevailing Opinion among the Speculative Part of Mankind, that Moral Excellence means nothing more than Public Utility.——To confirm or confute this Notion, is no Part of my present Design. But I judge it necessary to premise, that, on Supposition of the Truth of it, the main Difficulty, considered in my first Section, will appear to be no Difficulty at all ——If Actions themselves have no other Goodness, besides their Connection with Public Happiness; I believe it will be impossible to assign any Reason, why Opinions should be thought incapable of Moral Worth. For surely it is of great and general Importance, that Men should judge rightly in Matters of Religion.——If it be said, that
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our Judgment is not in our own Power, and that a free Choice is essential to Morality: I answer, That Circumstance is quite foreign to the Purpose; and the Reason is, because the Freedom of an Action no way affects it's Influence on the Public. If to be virtuous and to be useful are the very same Thing, equal Degrees of Utility must unavoidably deserve equal Approbation.——On the same Account it is perfectly insignificant, whether our Actions be intended or unintended; and even whether they be Actions, or not Actions. If they have no absolute Worth to recommend them, they can only be valued for the Good they produce. Whatever therefore produces the same Quantity of Good, must appear equally valuable and praise-worthy.

BUT because there are some Persons who cannot relish this Scheme of Morality; and because I am willing to vindicate the Scriptural Accounts of Faith, on all possible Suppositions; I have been forced to proceed upon the almost antiquated Notion of an intrinsic Difference between Good and Evil, and even to suppose that Good Actions have an Excellence peculiar to themselves, which cannot possibly belong to any Thing besides; and which therefore is intirely different from their good Influence on Society.——Whatever may be said

said as to the Truth of my Opinions, I would not willingly be thought to write without a Meaning. Whoever therefore rejects this Notion, as unreal and unintelligible; I shall esteem it a Favour if he will pass on directly to the second Section, without reading or regarding what goes before it.



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By Faith then in general, I understand
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that Portion of religious Knowledge, which is drawn from Divine Revelation ; and every Degree of such Knowledge I therefore consider as a Degree of Faith. By the Faith of a Christian, I understand that Faith which is drawn from the Christian Revelation in particular ; always including the Belief of this general Proposition, that the Christian Revelation is of Divine Authority.—I use the Word Knowledge, not in a philosophical, but a popular Sense ; intending only the Perception of Truth ; without regard to the Degree of Certainty, or to the Means of acquiring it. But I call one Man more knowing than another, when his Knowledge either extends to a greater Number of Objects ; takes them in with more Clearness and Precision ; or rises to a stronger Assurance. Agreeably to this Explication, Men differ from each other in Degrees of Faith, in Proportion as their religious Knowledge, so far as it is derived from Divine Revelation, is more extensive, more clear, or more certain.—Lastly, that Knowledge I call religious, which relates, either mediately, or immediately, to the Intercourse between God and Man : I mean to the various Acts performed, or to be performed on both Sides ; to God's general Dealings with Mankind, as well as to particular Dispensations ; to the various States of Mankind with respect to God, whether natural or adventitious ; and to the

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the various *Obligations*, as well as *Expectations* resulting from such States.*

KNOWLEGE is no Action. Nothing but Actions can deserve *Praise* or *Blame*. Knowledge therefore cannot *immediately* be the Object of either. This is equally true of religious Knowledge, as of any other Kind; and consequently *must* be extended to that *Portion* of religious Knowledge, which I comprehend under the Denomination of *Faith*.—On the other hand, the Writers of the New Testament, and even our Lord himself, have *recommended* Faith in the strongest Terms; and, to all Appearance, in the very same Sense, in which we have now defined it. We can scarce find a Page, either in the Epistles or Gospels, which does not abound in its *Praises*. It should seem therefore that, in this particular, the Voices of *Reason* and *Scripture* are directly *opposite*. And from this

B 2

seeming

* The learned Bishop *Pearson*, after distinguishing between *Human* Faith and *Divine*, defines the latter to be an *Assent unto something as credible, upon the Testimony of God*. But I have thought it necessary to be a little more *determinate*, with regard to the *Object* of Faith: First, by *confining* it to *religious* Truths; and secondly, by *extending* it to *all* revealed Truths, of that Nature. In the *former* of these Alterations, I presume I am justified by the common Acceptation of the Word: and as to the latter, I need only observe, that my present Enquiry does not relate to the Belief of *single* Propositions, but to the *whole* Faith of a Christian.—I have used the Word *Knowledge*, instead of *Assent*, because the former implies the *Truth* of what is believed, the latter may signify *indifferently* either a *right*, or an *erroneous* Judgment.

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seeming Opposition both Reason and Scripture have suffered extremely *. Some Persons have thought it necessary to relinquish Scripture, because determined to adhere to Reason; and many more to give up Reason, that they might not be led to oppose Scripture. In short, *rational* and *irrational* have been thought on both sides synonymous Terms with *Infidel* and *Believer*.

To extricate ourselves from this Difficulty, it is necessary to observe, that the very *same* Thing may in *different Respects*, and on *different Accounts*, both *deserve* and *not deserve* Commendation. That *Actions* only are the proper and immediate Objects of *Praise*, is, in a *moral* Sense, indisputably true. But neither is this the *only* kind of Praise; nor is *this* Praise itself usually confined to its *immediate* Objects. Whatever Qualities either moral or *natural*, are in *any* respect truly *valuable*; are always esteemed *praise-worthy*. Not only so, but, by an easy and common Figure of Speech, Things may frequently become the Objects of Praise, which have *in themselves* no Value at all; because they may *derive* a Value from *other* Things, to which they stand nearly related. Sometimes we look *upwards* to the *Causes* from which they proceed; sometimes *downwards* to the *Effects*

* This Opposition has been much *heightened* by that Confusion of *Faith* and *Credulity* abovementioned.

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Effects and Consequences which flow from them ; sometimes as it were *sideways*, to an *accidental* Connection they may have with *other* Causes, so that the *latter* cannot produce some valuable Operation, unless the *former* be presupposed.

SOMETHING of this may conveniently be illustrated by a very obvious Example.—Should any Person write a Book in Praise of *Learning*, he would surely be thought no Enemy to *Reason*; especially if by *Learning* he meant nothing more but sound and substantial *Knowlege*. And yet such a Person may be said to contradict *Reason*, by praising that which is no *Action*; and which therefore, *Reason* tells us, cannot be the Object of Praise. But the Reply is manifest—Tho' *Knowlege*, considered in itself, be no *moral Virtue*, yet is it in many respects truly *valuable*: valuable, because it presupposes a *right Conduct* of the Understanding, and that *Conduct* involves in it the Exercise of many *Virtues*; valuable, because, in its own *Nature*, the *Means* of procuring very great Advantages, both to the Possessor and to other Men; valuable, as it may *accidentally* be made the *Condition*, without which *other* Means of promoting our Interest would either be *less* effectual, or in some Cases entirely *ineffectual*.—These Things may, in some Degree, be truly affirmed of *Knowlege* in *general*; but with

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still greater Truth of *religious* Knowledge, and especially that *Part* of it, which is the Subject of our present Inquiry.

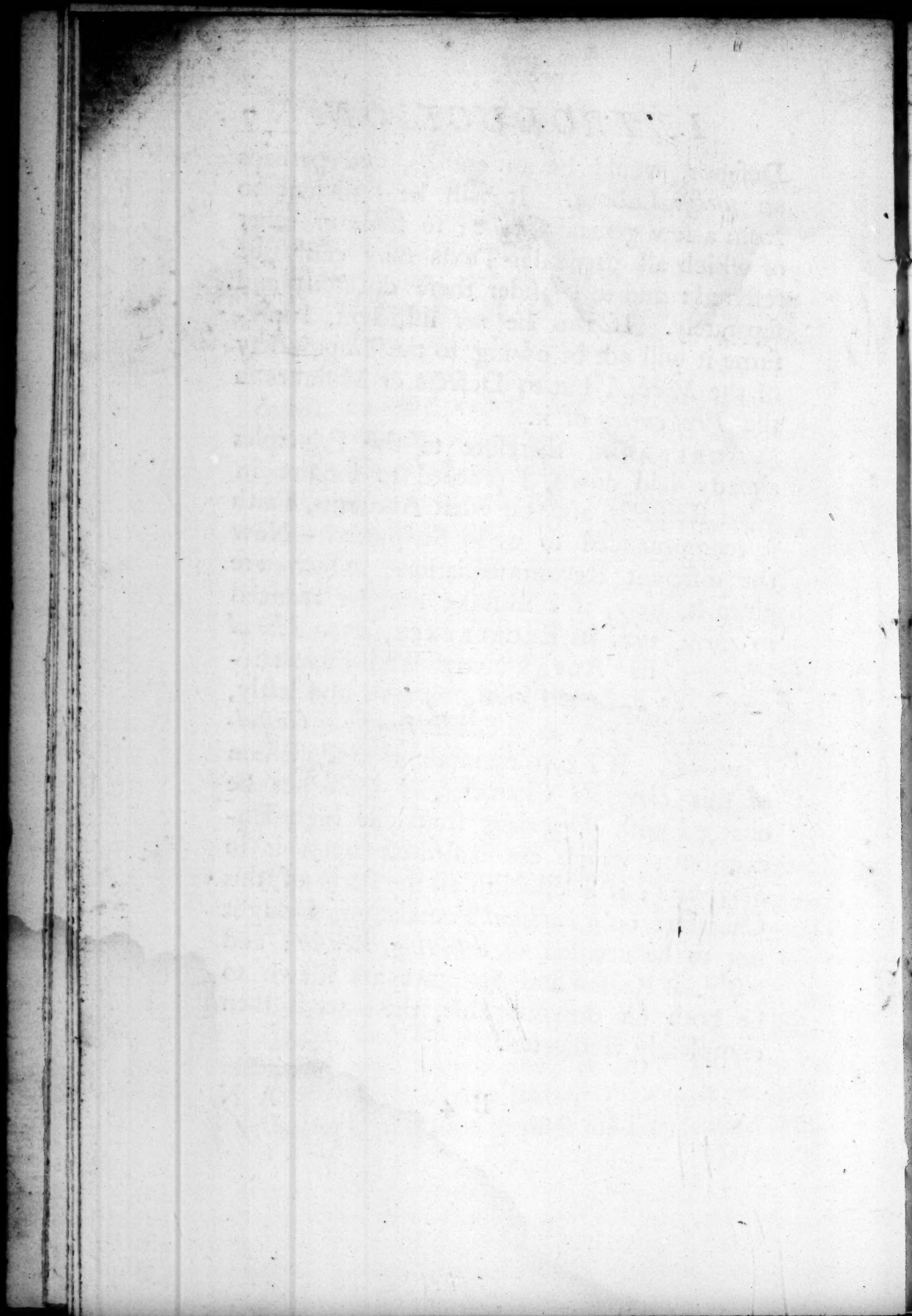
THUS are we brought back to the Point, from whence this Illustration took its Rise. I mean that *Faith*, tho' no *Action*, may yet, in *some Respects*, and on *some Accounts*, be very properly the Object of *Praise*. From whence it follows, that the supposed Inconsistency on this Head between *Scripture* and *Reason* is much less manifest, than is frequently imagined. We can by no means conclude from this *general* Position, that *Faith is praised by the Writers of the New Testament*, whether those Writers are consistent or inconsistent with *Right Reason*.

BUT we must not stop here.—Tho' Faith should be allowed a Title to *some* Kinds and Degrees of Praise; yet is it not represented, in Scripture, under *false* Colours? Is it not dressed up in such Characters, to which it neither has nor *can* have any Pretence? In short, is it possible to acquit the sacred Authors, amidst the frequent Commendations they bestow upon it, from a *Misapplication* in the *Kind* of Praise, and a *Profusion* in the Degree of it?—That we may be able to judge how far such a Vindication is practicable, our Inquiry must be more *particular*. To collect all the scattered Passages on this Subject, and allot to each its Explication and Defence,

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Defence, would be an endless, and perhaps an *useless* Labour. It will be sufficient to form a few general *Classes*; to some or other of which all particular Texts may easily be referred: and to consider these distinctly and separately. If this be *not* sufficient, I presume it will not be owing to the Impropriety of the *Method*, but to Defects or Mistakes in the *Prosecution* of it.

AGREEABLY therefore to the Principles already laid down, I proceed to inquire in what Respects, and on what Accounts, Faith is recommended to us in Scripture?—Now the different Recommendations, which are given it, may, if I mistake not, be reduced to *three*, viz. its EXCELLENCE, as a *Moral Virtue*; its ADVANTAGE and SUFFICIENCY, as a *Means of Salvation*; and lastly, its NECESSITY, as a *Condition of the Gospel-Covenant*. If I can maintain it in Possession of this *threefold* Character, I shall not be charged with *derogating* from the high Encomiums, which are bestowed upon it in *Scripture*; if I establish all the Parts of this Character on a *rational* Foundation, I ought not to be accused of *deserting Reason*; and lastly, if Reason and Scripture are shewn to be both on the *same* Side, the latter is then compleatly vindicated.



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IT has already been admitted that *Faith*, when considered *in itself*, I mean abstractedly from its *Causes* and *Consequences*, cannot be ranked in the Number of the VIRTUES. Its Value therefore, in a *moral* Sense, *must* be derived from something *without* itself.—But shall we limit the Idea of Moral Excellence, to those Objects which are *intrinsically* good? Shall no Quality be esteemed *praise-worthy*, besides those which have an *inherent* Value?—If the Conceptions and Language of the Generality of Mankind were strictly just and *philosophical*, such a Limitation might perhaps take place; and it is
equally

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equally true, that all *Figures of Speech* must be utterly banished from Conversation and Writing. For, according to this *rigorous* Procedure, they are only so many *Misapplications* of Words and Ideas. The *Metaphor*, upon a very slender Resemblance, shifts and changes the *Properties* of Things; the *Metonymy* jumbles *Cause* and *Effect*, *Subject* and *Adjunct*; the *Synecdoche* confounds the *Whole* with its *Parts*: and so on of all the rest. When these *Improprieties* are all out of use, it will *then* be reasonable to confine our Praise to the *immediate* Objects of Praise; that is, to the *Determinations* of the *Will*. But while our ways of speaking continue what they *are*, and what they always *have been*; nothing can be more obvious, or more natural, than to transfer the Excellence of the *Cause* to the *Effect*, and *v. v.* that of the *Effect* to the *Cause*.—The use of this Figure in *moral* Subjects is neither less proper, nor less *frequent*, than in Subjects of any other kind. So far from it, that a total *Disuse* of it would overturn at once our whole *moral Language*. So that whoever denies the Excellence of *Faith*, on no other Grounds than what I am here opposing; must, on the very *same* Grounds, deny the Worth of *all* good Qualities whatever. I say good *Qualities*: by which I understand good *Affections*; good *Habits*; good *Dispositions* of Mind. *All* these

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these *derive* their Excellence from the particular Series of good *Actions*, by which they are produced, improved, and cultivated: and yet this *derivative* Excellence is universally esteemed and acknowledged a just Title to Approbation and Praise. Those two great Principles of all Duty, the *Love of God* and our *Neighbour*, are, if considered *abstractedly*, utterly incapable of *moral* Worth. For Love is an *Affection* of the Mind; and *Affections* are not *Actions*. But because these *Affections* are the *Result* of some Virtues, and the *Foundation* of many more; because they are the natural *Effect*, and the probable *Means* of Right *Conduct*: they assume to *themselves* those Praises, to which they generally *presuppose*, and frequently *produce* a just Title.—May we not then maintain that *Faith* is a *moral Virtue*; if we are able to shew that it springs from the noblest *Causes*, and is productive of the most valuable *Consequences*? That it is, in short, the *Effect*, and the *Ground* of Virtue?—Nothing surely will hinder us from applying the same Figure of Speech in *both* Cases. But then we shall be forced to *acknowledge*, what has been too often either *denied* or *overlook'd*, that if *Faith* may *accidentally* subsist; without *those Causes*, and *those Effects*: such a *Faith* is, *morally* speaking, of no Value at all. Just as an *innate* Benevolence, or a Benevolence *accidentally* acquired, or a Benevolence
which

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which is *restrained* from producing its genuine *Fruits*, ought not to be honoured with the Name of *Virtue*.

I would willingly establish the Force of my *Conclusion*, before I proceed to consider more particularly those *Assertions* on which it is *founded*.—Now for the effectual *Support* of the Conclusion, nothing further seems to be necessary, than to vindicate the *Propriety* of praising Faith, on account of an Excellence *not its own*: to *confirm* at large, what we have already *asserted*, that it stands exactly upon the *same* Footing with *all other* Good Qualities; and particularly with those *fundamental* Virtues, the *Love* of God, and our *Neighbour*.—To this End, it may be proper to remove a very material *Objection*, which will naturally occur to a thinking Man, on perusing what has been here advanced.

FOR may it not be urged, *That the Instances produced are by no Means parallel to the Case before us? That right Affections naturally flow from right Conduct, but that no Degree of Care in our Pursuits after Knowledge, can ever be sufficient to ensure our Success? That on the contrary, an exact and scrupulous Inquiry may, in numberless and obvious Cases, be productive of Error, as well as Truth? and that Error itself would, in these Instances, have the same Title to the Name of Virtue, which is here pleaded in Behalf of*
true

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true Faith?—It is impossible to answer Objections of this Kind, without running into a Controversy, which, in a great Measure, will be only verbal. But even a *verbal* Controversy may, in this Case, be of real use. For, unless it be perfectly consistent with the common *Forms of Speech*, to bestow the highest Commendations on Faith, for the sake of a *borrowed* Excellence; it may be thought that our Saviour considered bare *Assent*, as a Thing in its *own* Nature *praise-worthy*. Than which a greater Absurdity cannot be imputed to him. Let us therefore examine, with this View, what Force there is in the Objections proposed? and whether *Faith* have not as fair a Title to our Praise, as the *other* Virtues compared with it?

THAT the Instances produced are in *all* respects *parallel*, is a Point I am not concerned to maintain. It is sufficient for my Purpose, that they agree in *those* Particulars, in which the course of my Argument *requires* it. I mean that *religious* and *benevolent Affections* can only be entitled to the Name of *Virtues* on account of a *derivative* Excellence. They are acquired by a Series of virtuous *Actions*, and are *therefore* esteemed and called *Virtues*. In *this* respect they agree with Faith. In *another* respect they are *supposed* to differ. But that, I presume, no way affects the Point before us. For, supposing

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posing a Quality to be *virtuously* acquired, what avails it, whether it was the *necessary* Consequence, or only the *probable* Result of Right Conduct? And yet this is the *sole* Point of Difference, which *can* be alleged in the present Case.—A careful and conscientious Endeavour to obtain a sound and rational Faith, tho' it *naturally* tends to make us *wise Men*, may yet, thro' a Concurrence of *accidental* Impediments, be altogether insufficient for that Purpose. But how does it follow from hence, that Faith is *no* Virtue? Whoever attempts to draw such a Conclusion, must first prove that all *moral* Improvements, of what kind soever, are absolutely and entirely in our own *Power*; than which nothing can be more false, or more contrary to universal Experience. Every *Capacity*, every *Age*, every *Station* in Life has *peculiar* Advantages and Disadvantages in this respect: almost every *Individual* is separately furnished with Means and Opportunities which others want.

BUT to put this Matter out of all doubt, I believe it will appear, to a considerate Inquirer, that this is actually the Case in the Instances *alleged*; and by consequence, that the *Parallel* holds *quite thro'*. I am not afraid to affirm that the *Love of God* and our *Neighbour*, in that Degree of *Perfection* which the Gospel recommends, are not *universally* attain-

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attainable ; are not in *all* Men the *necessary* Effects of *Right Conduct*. It cannot, I think, be questioned, that very many Persons, thro' a Defect in their natural Constitution, are not capable of *Affections* at all ; or at least in so cold and languishing a Degree, as can by no means come up to those *Characters* of *Love*, which are laid down in the New Testament.—But setting this aside, Men's Progress in these and all other Virtues will unavoidably depend on their Progress in *Knowledge*. For, supposing, what the Objection allows us to suppose, that *Sincerity* is not inconsistent either with *Ignorance* or *Error* ; supposing that an honest and virtuous Man should yet fall into great *Mistakes* ; whether relating to the *Deity*, or his *Fellow Creatures*, or the respective *Duties* he owes to *both* ; how is it possible he should *love* them as he ought ?—He who will assert the Possibility of this, will find himself obliged to maintain, that these Evangelical Virtues were practised in as great Perfection by the *Greeks* and *Romans*, nay, by the most ignorant and *barbarous* Nations, as by the Followers of *Christ* himself ; *those*, I mean, who make the *best* use of the Revelation they enjoy. If he will not maintain this, he must then impute the Deficiency *universally* to no other Cause but *wrong Conduct*. If this too be given up, it remains that *right Conduct* may, in numberless Instances,
fail

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fail of producing *right Affections*. These Affections therefore are only the *probable Effect* of virtuous Actions; and therefore the *Instances* are still *parallel*.—A Man *sincerely* virtuous may, not only in Point of *Faith*, but in *many* other Respects, fall short of *Evangelical Perfection*.

IT is then no Objection to what we have been saying, that many Persons want the *Means* of arriving at a true Faith: that some have not *Leisure*, or *Capacity*, to enter upon a rational Inquiry; that others, who are Masters of *both*, are yet frequently hindered by *unavoidable Prejudices*, from the Discovery of the Truth. This, I say, can never prove that those who are blessed with more *favourable Opportunities*, may not deserve great Praise for making a right *Use* of them; or that some Part of the Credit may not be *derived* on the *Faith itself* thus acquired.

But an exact and scrupulous Inquiry may frequently be productive of Error. And is Error too a moral Virtue?—I answer, this is a great Mistake. An impartial Inquiry may sometimes *terminate* in Error; but that it is the *Cause* of Error, I utterly deny. If it frequently happens in our Search after Truth, that we embrace the Shadow instead of the Substance; this Delusion is by no means to be ascribed to our *Diligence* in searching: but to those *Impediments*, whatever they were,
by

by which this Diligence was rendered *fruitless*; to *Incapacity*, to unavoidable *Prejudice*, and perhaps not seldom to a mistaken *Deference* for *Authority*. Many more are the Causes of Error; but a free and impartial Inquiry is *not* the Cause of it. And therefore, whatever *Merit* there may be in such an Inquiry, the Errors themselves can have no Title to it. Let me just add, that a rational Search is not only naturally *productive* of Knowledge; but, in some degree, always *produces* it. Let other Circumstances be supposed equal, and I appeal to the warmest Adversary, whether a *careful Inquirer* will not be universally possessed of more *sound* Knowledge, than a Man who *forbears* to inquire at all, or a *negligent* and *partial* Inquirer?—If this be evident, I hope I may be allowed to affirm, that a diligent Search after Truth is the Source of Knowledge, not of Error; and, by consequence, I am freed from the Absurdity of supposing Error to be a *moral Virtue*.

How far this Notion of a *rational* Faith is agreeable to the Accounts contained in *Scripture*, will be more conveniently considered afterwards. It will first be requisite to explain more distinctly those *Grounds* and *Causes*, from which I would *derive* it's *moral Excellence*. And if it appear, upon a fair Inquiry, to be, as I have *supposed*, the Offspring of *Virtue*; I presume we may safely join in

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it's *Praises*, without incurring the least Suspicion of yielding a *Tribute* which cannot reasonably be demanded. At least the Objection now brought can be no Bar to such a Claim: nor do we discover any sufficient Reason, why in *this*, as well as in *other* Instances, the Excellence of the *Cause* may not be transferred to the *Effect*.

KNOWLEDGE in *general* may be sought and obtained on various and different *Motives*. Not only a Love for *Truth*; an honest Intention to regulate our *own* Conduct; or a Disposition to be useful to *Mankind*: but also an *Ostentation* of Parts and Learning; a Desire of *qualifying* ourselves for *lucrative* Employments: or possibly of *circumventing* other Men by the Force of superior Discernment and Cunning. We are not therefore to wonder, that a Quality of such doubtful Origin, however laboriously acquired, is not usually esteemed *virtuous*. I say not *usually*; for the best Moralists among the Heathens have judged *otherwise*; attending perhaps to the Excellence of the *Means*, or the Goodness of the *Effects*, rather than the Uprightness of the *Motives*.—But however this shall be determined; that *Part* of Knowledge which we are now considering is liable to no such Objection. No Man, I believe, ever examined into the Doctrines and Precepts of *Religion*, with solemn Care, and strict Impartiality, on such Principles

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Principles as are here supposed : partly because all the Views of Honour and Interest are generally to be answered at a much cheaper Rate ; and partly because every Step he took in the Disquisition *itself*, would either *discourage* him from proceeding further, or induce him to proceed upon *better* Motives.—But if a *few* Exceptions are to be *allowed* (and *many*, I think, cannot be *demand*ed ;) these, I presume, are sufficiently provided for, by a Concession already made, *That Faith purely accidental can have no Merit at all.*

ACCORDING to the *natural* Progress of Things, the Motive for *seeking* religious Knowledge is a conscientious Desire of discharging our *Duty* : the Means of *obtaining* it are *Humility, Impartiality, Probity, Diligence.* The *Motive* can hardly subsist, but in a sincere and honest Mind : the *Means* can never be put into Execution, without a steady Adherence to Virtue, in Opposition to the strongest Temptations. Every Degree therefore of *religious Knowledge* implies a proportionable Degree of *Moral Goodness.*——If an honest *Heart* have a natural Tendency to lead Men into a right *Understanding* ; the *latter*, wherever it is observed, may fairly be considered as an *Effect* and *Indication* of the *former.*

BUT the Qualifications above-mentioned, for the Acquisition of religious Knowledge, require to be a little unfolded ; that their Con-

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nection with Faith may more distinctly appear. — By *Humility* I would at present understand a just Sense of our own *Weakness*; either the Weakness of Human Understanding in *general*, or of our *own* in *particular*: a constant Reflection how liable we *all* are to be deceived and imposed on, how frequently we *ourselves* have been led into Error, and how little Reason we have to maintain with *Confidence* any Opinions whatsoever; those only excepted, which are founded on *demonstrative* Evidence, and which are *improperly* called *Opinions*. With whatever Degree of *Probability* Things may appear, the Man who is truly *humble* will always bear about him this Reflection, that it is *possible* he may be mistaken. And, when he considers the *many* Instances, in which he has been *strongly* persuaded upon *weak* and *erroneous* Principles; he will learn to *suspect* his own Decisions, and to *distrust* his own Judgment in *all* Cases that come before him. — I presume it will be needless to prove, that *Humility*, thus understood, implies in it the Exercise of *Virtue*. That it naturally leads to the Discovery of *Truth*, and especially of *religious* Truth, will easily appear; if it be considered, that the *contrary* Disposition steels the Mind against Conviction. He who is not accustomed to *doubt* of his own Abilities, will come with an invincible Prejudice to the Hearing of *new* Doctrines.

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Doctrines. He will have no Thoughts of informing *himself*; but bend all his Pains and Skill to the Confutation of *others*: and he who hears with a Resolution of *confuting*, will find it no difficult Matter to confute *any Thing*.—But a cautious and suspicious Temper of Mind, suspicious I mean of *itself*, and it's *own* Sufficiency, naturally puts a Man upon his *Guard*; teaches him to *assert* without *Confidence*, and to *listen* without *Prejudice*. It gives him a just and proper Deference for the Sentiments of *others*; and makes him at all Times ready to receive *Truth*, from *whomsoever* it may come.—This is more remarkably true, when applied to *religious* Opinions; because these, of all others, are generally *embraced* upon the *slightest* Grounds, and *retained* with the greatest *Obstinacy*. The Usefulness therefore of Humility is here more *clearly* discerned; because it is more *evidently*, and more *frequently* wanted.

A M A N is said to inquire *impartially*, when he comes to the Inquiry, without any *preconceived* Opinions on *either* Side of the Question.—Strictly speaking, this is a Qualification not to be expected: but, I presume, it will not be denied, that for a Man to approach as *near* to it as he *can*, is a right and *virtuous* Conduct.—Is it not equally manifest that such a Conduct is in some Degree *necessary* for the Attainment of *Knowledge*? Do

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not *Prejudices* naturally and unavoidably throw a Mist upon the Understanding? Do they not wonderfully illustrate the Arguments on *one* Side ; and make us lose Sight of the *contrary* Arguments?—Let it only be considered that to judge *rightly*, we must first have taken a View of the *whole* Case ; that such a View is not to be had, if we turn our Eyes only *one* Way ; and that all *preconceived* Opinions are sure to take off our Attention from Reasons which, we are already determined, neither have, nor *can* have any Weight. Unless these Reasons could operate upon the Mind without being *perceived* and *understood* ; it would be absurd to expect that such an Inquiry should ever turn to any good Account.—But this *Impartiality* is *peculiarly* needful in our *religious* Inquiries. And the Reason is obvious. For here Prejudices are carefully *infused* into us from our very *Nativity* ; and so, taking Root in young and tender Minds, are never afterwards to be plucked up, without great Care and extraordinary Prudence. Hence it is that in all Ages and Nations the religious Opinions of Parents are handed down to their Children ; and perhaps not one in ten Thousand has the Wisdom or the Courage to reject them ; however absurd and erroneous.—This I say makes it absolutely necessary for every sincere Inquirer, to exert himself with the utmost Vigilance, in weeding out of his Mind
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all *Principles*, which he has derived from any other Source than the Use and Application of his own *Reason*.*

BY *Probity* I intend a *Disregard* to Motives of private *Passion*, or secular *Interest*.— That it is *reasonable* to exclude all Thoughts of this Nature from our religious Deliberations, no Man, I believe, ever denied. Nor shall I need to use many Words to make it appear that such an Exclusion is *quite* requisite for the Attainment of religious *Knowledge*. In most other Parts of Learning it has indeed no Place: but *here* it is of the last Importance.— Whoever sits down to chuse his *Religion* under the Influence of some prevailing *Passion*, or with a Prospect of *secular Advantage* full

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* I am sensible the Method here recommended of a cautious Examination into established Doctrines will not suit the Taste of those Persons, who have formed their Notions by *Fashion*, rather than *Reason*. A pertinacious Adherence to received Opinions has been too often thought the most *essential* Part of Religion, and the high Road to *Perfection*. But Experience and Reflection have in some Measure opened our Eyes; and taught us that, in order to believe rightly, we must in the first Place *purify* our *Hearts*: I mean, that we must *purge* away those *Prejudices*, which, above all Things, defeat our Studies and disappoint our Inquiries; that we must throw off, as much as possible, all Attachment either to our *Superiors* or our *Ancestors*; and endeavour, for a Time, at least, to *forget* that we are Members of the *best* Church upon *Earth*. Without this *necessary* Precaution, we may indeed be *zealous* in her *Defence*; but the Zeal of an *Indian* for his favourite *Idol* will be equally *rational*, and equally *meritorious*.—He only is a *true* Friend to this, or any other, Establishment; whose *Friendship* is the Effect of *Conviction*, and whose *Conviction* has been drawn from him *merely* by the *Weight* of *Evidence*.

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in his View ; has no Chance for seeing any Evidence, which would interfere with the Accomplishment of his Desires. *Facile omnes credimus quod volumus* is a Maxim attested by universal Experience. It is therefore an indispensable Means of *Knowledge* to shut our Eyes, as much as possible, against these Objects ; and not suffer them to come in our Way, whenever we are seeking after *such* Truths, as may *happen* to be inconsistent with the Possession of them.

WHAT I mean by *Diligence* needs no Explanation. All *Knowledge* requires *Labour* : and Labour, directed to a right End, is *Virtue*.—If any Person imagine *religious Knowledge* is to be had at a *cheaper* Rate, I presume he is greatly mistaken. Other Circumstances being supposed equal, a Man's *Improvements* cannot but bear an exact Proportion to his *Endeavours*.—We may therefore conclude that a clear and extensive *Knowledge* of Divine Things, supported by firm and rational Proof, is rarely to be acquired without great *Virtue* : and that every *Degree* of such *Knowledge* infers a proportionable Degree of *Care*, both in the Conduct of the *Understanding* itself, and in the Use and Application of all fit *Means* for it's continual Improvement and Information.

I FEAR it will be thought that, in this Inquiry, I have long since lost Sight of my
Subject.

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Subject. Let us therefore try, before we proceed any farther, how these Things tend to the Support and Establishment of the main Point.—I *undertook* to shew that the *Faith* of a *Christian* is *deservedly* represented to us, in Scripture, under the Notion of a *Moral Virtue*. I have shewn, *in Fact*, that this Appellation may justly be given to *all* religious Knowledge; on account of the *Excellence* of those *Causes*, by which it is naturally and generally produced. But now this *universal* Conclusion manifestly *includes* the *particular* Proposition, in the Proof of which I was engaged. It does so on *Supposition* of the **Truth* of Christianity; and I am not now arguing, nor disposed to argue, on any *other* Supposition. It may therefore be already concluded that Reason and Scripture are so far perfectly agreed.

BUT I mean not to rely wholly on these *general* Reflections. It will certainly be requisite, on many Accounts, to make a more distinct

* It cannot surely be expected that I should prove the Reasonableness of believing a *false* Religion. If the *Evidences* of Christianity are insufficient, certainly the *Faith* of a Christian deserves no Praise. What I am concerned to maintain is only this; that *supposing* those Evidences to be *otherwise* unexceptionable, the Commendations bestowed on *Faith* will not *diminish* their Weight: will not afford any *Objection* against a Religion well supported by solid and rational *Proof*.—But I shall freely own that we cannot be *more* certain of the *Moral Excellence* of Faith, than we are of the *Truth* of our Religion itself.

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distinct *Application* of these Principles to the *Faith of a Christian* in particular.—And here it is obvious to remark that, if religious Doctrines, of *whatever* Kind, deserve and require a careful Examination ; it must be of the utmost Importance to inform ourselves rightly concerning *Revealed Religion* : that in searching diligently after this Information there will be fresh Room, and greater Scope, for the Exercise of those *Moral Virtues*, which have been already enumerated : and that, if the *Merit* of our religious Knowledge be either measured by it's Extent or it's Certainty, a rational Belief of the Doctrines of *Christianity* will be in an eminent Degree *praise-worthy*.

IN order to conceive more clearly the Force and Truth of this Observation, and the better to prevent *Misconstruction* ; it may be proper to distinguish, in this Place, between a *general* and *previous* Belief of the *Divine Origin* of our Religion, and a *subsequent* Belief of it's *particular Doctrines*. These Cases being, in a very material Point, essentially different.

THAT *Jesus Christ was a true Prophet, commissioned by God to declare his Will to Mankind*, is a Doctrine we are taught from our very Childhood. Education and Interest conspire to fix it in our Minds ; and scarce suffer the Generality of Christians to entertain the least Doubt or Scruple about it. Indeed the present Age has been more fruitful of Ex-
amples

amples to the contrary, than perhaps any that went before it. But even still it must be acknowledged, that Men's *Prejudices* and *Prepossessions* are far more on the *Side* of Christianity, than they are *against* it. Unless we should suppose, that all these are sufficiently *ballanced*, by the invincible *Repugnance* which will always subsist, between the *Duties* of our *Religion*, and the *Gratification* of our *Passions*: What Weight this may have in determining the Judgments of *some* Persons cannot easily be ascertained. I pretend not to build any Thing upon it, and am content to allow for Argument's Sake, that, in these *later Ages* of Christianity, the Belief of this *general* Proposition does not presuppose the Exercise of *Virtue*; and, by consequence, ought not to be considered as a *Quality morally excellent*.

BUT then I shall still insist that the Knowledge of *particular Doctrines* greatly depends on our *own* Conduct; and, by consequence, may justly be considered as an Object of Approbation and Praise.—Among the various Sects, and Denominations of Christians, it requires great *Care*, and great *Integrity*, to make a rational Choice: And it is a strong *Presumption* of Virtue, if we have been able to arrive at the *true* Faith, in spite of all the Impediments, which *Education* and *Interest* may have thrown in our Way. This at least will
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be allowed to hold true, by a Majority of Readers, in respect of all *other* Christians, but those who have had the peculiar Happiness to be born within the Pale of our *Established Church*.—It will, if I mistake not, go still farther. For tho' all our Prejudices be supposed to lie on the Side of *Truth*; yet this can only affect those who *search* after Truth. We may, if we please, continue supinely *ignorant*; and, while we profess ourselves Members of the *Church of England*, be utter Strangers to *Christianity* itself.—He who only *believes* in *Christ*, without attending to the *Doctrines* he taught, has made but a very small Proficiency in *Christian Faith*. And every Degree beyond this, generally speaking, depends upon *ourselves*. I say *generally*; for it is not *universally* true, that Men are utterly destitute of a *Christian Education*.

NOT only *Ignorance* but *Error* too is consistent with a Profession of adhering to the *Established Church*.—Were the *Church herself* exempt from all *Possibility* of Error, yet this would be no Security to her *Members*. Creeds, Confessions, and Articles of Faith will always be liable to Variety of *Interpretation*; and whatever is *variously* interpreted, *must* be *wrong* interpreted. Accordingly we find in Fact, that the most *peremptory* Decisions have had very little Effect in procuring or promoting *Uniformity of Opinion*. It must not be
imagined,

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imagined, that, because we all agree in one Form of *Words*, we are therefore agreed in one common *Faith*. Different Divines of our *own* Church have represented Christianity in such different and even *opposite* Lights; that scarce any two Systems of Religion can have less Similitude, than the Explications, which are given us of one and the *same* System. We have therefore great Room to exercise the Virtues above-mentioned; in *comparing* and considering these contrary Schemes, and *determining* according to *Evidence*.—Sure I am, the *more* virtuous we are, the *better* we shall *understand* true Christianity.

BUT if a *general* Belief in *Christ* is acknowledged to be void of *moral Worth*, it should seem that the *principal* Difficulty yet remains unanswered. For are there not various Passages in Scripture, in which this *previous* Faith is strongly, and *peculiarly* commended?—I freely own it. But I maintain at the same Time, that the Concession lately made no way affects *that* Commendation. The Persons, whose Faith is there extolled, were new *Converts* to Christianity; Men, whom neither *Prejudices*, nor *Authority*, nor *Interest*, had been able to hinder from *seeing* and *acknowledging*, that *Christ Jesus* was the Son of God. A Case, of all others, where the Merit of Faith appears in the strongest Light; because
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it most *plainly* presupposes a *fair* and *honest* Inquiry.

It cannot surely be thought necessary, that I should either cite particular Passages, or allege distinct Arguments, to prove that this is a true Representation of the Case. The Thing speaks itself. For, to instance only in *one* Particular, *all* the Christians then in Being, when these Commendations were given, *must* have been converted either from *Judaism* or *Heathenism*. Either then they had the *common* Prejudices of *Jews* and *Heathens*, or they *had not*. If they *had*; it was an Argument of Virtue, that they *guarded* against their Influence: if they *had not*; it was an Argument of perhaps yet *greater* Virtue, that they had found Means to escape the general Contagion, and preserve their Understandings pure, and undefiled, and fit for the Reception of *Truth*. So that in either Case they were proper Objects of *Approbation* and *Favour*. It cannot therefore be wondered, that Christ and his Apostles considered and *treated* them as such.*
—But when we add to this, that *particular*
Persons

* This may be *one* Reason why the miraculous Cures performed by our Blessed Lord were, in some Cases, *confined* to *Believers*.—But the *chief* Reason seems to have been this. The main End of Miracles was the *Confirmation* of our Saviour's *Mission*: from whence it follows that miraculous Operations were always to be restrained in *such* a Manner, as might best answer *this* End. As therefore the Powers of *working* Miracles were only communicated to *Disciples*; so the *passive* Power of
receiving

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Persons must have been liable to *peculiar* Prejudices; and when we consider that *Authority* as well as *Interest* strongly drew them the *same* Way: we shall want no further Evidence of the Point in question.—If more *were* wanted, it might be observed that a great Part of the Praises, which we have here endeavoured to vindicate, were given by Him, who *knew what was in Man*: who was intimately acquainted with the most secret Workings of the human *Heart*. In all Reason therefore we ought to conclude, that, in those Instances where he commended *Faith*, he did it upon a *certain* Knowledge of the *good Principles*, from whence it proceeded.

ONE Objection remains to be answered, before I conclude this Head; an Objection drawn from the Scripture itself.—According to the Explication now given, the more *rational* our Faith is, and the more *excellent*. But we are told that Scripture ascribes the chief Merit to a Faith *not* founded on *Reason*; from whence it follows that the Account given is altogether wide of the Purpose.—I answer, the Assertion is absolutely and universally *false*. Not a single Passage occurs in the New Testament, where any Man is commended

receiving their beneficial Influence was often joined with *Faith* in *Christ*. By this *Appropriation* of supernatural Privileges, it was made still more evident, to impartial Spectators, that the Religion of Jesus was supported and *favoured* by the great *Author* of Miracles.

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mended for *believing* without *Evidence*. Whoever thinks fit to maintain the contrary, it will be incumbent upon him to shew, either, 1st, That Prophecies and Miracles afford *no* rational Evidence ; or, 2^{dly}, That Faith is commended, in a Person who was *unacquainted* with this Evidence ; or, 3^{dly}, That those who *least* regarded it are *most* commended in Holy Scripture. The contrary of all which is manifestly true.

THE sole Foundation of this Objection appears to me to be *this*.—Men are sometimes commended for believing, not upon *insufficient* Grounds, or *without* Inquiry ; but upon *less* Evidence, than others had demanded, and after a *shorter* Inquiry than was generally made. And this in perfect Consistence with the Notion we have been maintaining. For, if the Merit of Faith arises, in great Measure, from a due Care in extirpating Prejudices ; the *more* *effectually* these were extirpated, the *greater* would this Merit be. And I fear not to assert that *those* Persons, who had most *effectually* weeded out their *Prejudices*, would most *readily* embrace *Christianity* ; would both be convinced upon *less* Evidence, and in a *shorter* Time, than other Men. For, without Question, the *Difficulty* of our *Conviction*, all other Circumstances being supposed equal, is always in Proportion to the *Strength* of our *Prejudices*. *Strong* Prejudices are not to be
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overcome with less than *demonstrative* Arguments ; while those of a *slighter* Sort will frequently give way to *moral* Proofs : and, could we suppose a Man entirely *free* from Prejudice ; he would yield to *every* Kind of Reasoning, at least when rightly understood, *those* Degrees of Force and Weight, which justly and properly *belong* to it.—So that a ready Assent to the Truth of our Saviour's Mission, *supposing* that Mission to be *well attested*, was an Argument of a *fair* and *candid* Mind ; it was not, as is pretended, a Sign of *Credulity* ; but a Sign of *Honesty* and *good Sense* : and, as such, was *deservedly* commended.

INDEED our Saviour never fails to express his Approbation on receiving a *reasonable* and *intelligent* Answer. And, what is very remarkable, in more Instances than one, he extols the *Faith* of the Persons with whom he is conversing, as it should seem, on no other Account, than because they gave Signs of a *good Understanding* on the Subject of *Religion*.—How different this from those Notions, which are industriously propagated in *Catholic Countries* ; that all the Merit of Faith consists in assenting, we know not *why*, to Doctrines we do not, and cannot *understand* ! or, to speak more properly, in *professing* to believe, what, in Truth and *Fact*, can neither be *believed*, nor *disbelieved* by any Man living !—But such a Faith, *where-ever* it is to be found,

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comes not within the Bounds of this Inquiry ; as being no *Portion of religious Knowledge*, or indeed of any Knowledge at all.

To return — If those Profelytes, who are mentioned in the Gospel, appear to us to have been too *hasty* in embracing a *new Religion* ; we should consider the Strength of the *Evidence*, by which that Religion was supported. They who had seen, with their own Eyes, a *dead Man* raised to *Life*, might surely be excused from all *Hesitation*. Nay, the least and lowest of our Saviour's *Miracles*, when taken in Conjunction with his *Character* and *Doctrine*, could not fail of producing a very *speedy Effect* in the Minds of sober and reasonable Men.—Nor would this render their Belief morally *worthless*. The Excellence of Faith is by no means to be estimated from the Length of *Time* taken up in the Inquiry ; but chiefly depends on those *good Dispositions* of Mind, with which we begin to inquire. Indeed a diligent *Perseverance* in searching for the Truth was, in *their Circumstances*, neither possible, nor *needful*. But the Virtues of *Humility* and *Impartiality* might still appear with the greatest Lustre. Nay, the *sooner* Men assented to the Truth of our Saviour's Mission, the *clearer Evidence* they gave, that they were neither *prejudiced* in Favour of *received Opinions*, nor violently *attached* to their *own*. And surely secular *Interest* was quite excluded

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excluded from their Thoughts: when they *left all that they had and followed Christ*: when they *believed Him* to be a true *Prophet*, whose Commands were so *disagreeable* to corrupt *Nature*, so utterly *inconsistent* with temporal *Prosperity*. We can have small Reason to doubt of *their Probity*, who were content to expose themselves to the Frowns of their *Superiors*, the Contumely of the *Rabble*, and the Contempt of *all*; merely to obey the *Call of Truth*. I say nothing of the *Persecutions* which followed, because these, it may be said were not then foreseen.—But I cannot forbear repeating in this Place, that whatever *Exceptions* there might be to these *general* Observations; our Saviour's *Knowledge* of Men's inmost *Thoughts* perfectly well enabled him to find them out. We have therefore no Pretence for supposing, that he bestowed his Praise on unworthy Objects.

AFTER all, where can be the Merit of *yielding to irresistible Evidence*? Whether Men assented soon or late, yet an Assent *extorted by Miracles*, may seem to have been *unavoidable*, and therefore *undeserving* of Praise.—But if the Efficacy of Miracles were so great as this Objection supposes, how came it to pass that Thousands of Spectators remained *unconverted*? And why was the Number of *true* Disciples, during the Lifetime of our Saviour, comparatively speaking

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so very *small*?—I only desire an Answer to this single Question, why *some* believed, and *others* believed not; when the very *same* Evidence had been offered to *both*?—The Difference could result from nothing else, but Men's different *Capacities* or different *Dispositions* of Mind. Not the former, because *the wise and prudent*, the *leading* Men among the *Jews*, were the most *virulent* in their *Opposition*, and most *obstinate* in their *Unbelief*. It was owing therefore to the *latter* of these Causes. Either then we must ascribe it to a faulty *Credulity* on one Side, and a rational *Suspence* on the other; or to *Humility* and *Candour* in the *former*, *Pride* and *Prejudice* in the *latter*. But he must be an utter Stranger to the Opinions and Temper of the *Jews*, who can imagine *any* Part of them disposed to *Credulity*, in a Matter of this Nature. Nothing could lie more cross to their *Apprehensions* and their *Passions*; nothing could be more unlikely to meet with a favourable Reception, than the Religion of a *crucified Saviour* *. — Their Conviction then was owing to no other Cause, but a *fair* and *candid* Disposition of Mind. By this they were enabled to surmount the greatest Difficulties, and to remove the strongest

* As for those who followed him under the Notion of a *Temporal Prince*; and immediately *deserted* him, when they found themselves disappointed: *they*, I presume, are out of the Question. For it does not appear that the Faith of *such* Persons is ever extolled in the sacred Writings.

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est Impediments. To this it was owing that *Children and Babes* (as our Saviour beautifully calls them) enjoyed a *clear Revelation* of those Truths, which were *hid from the Eyes of the Rulers* themselves. That *Hiding* might be partly *judicial*, as a just Reward of Hypocrisy and Villany. But doubtless it was chiefly occasioned by a *wilful Perversion* of their *own Faculties*—In short, if Miracles are sufficient for the *Conviction* of a *reasonable Man*; but *not* sufficient for the *Satisfaction* of an *unreasonable* one: then it must be allowed that our Saviour's Ministry afforded Room for the Exercise of *those Virtues*, on which I found the Excellence of *Faith*.

ONE Thing more I think it needful to observe, before I quit this Part of my Subject.—It may possibly be thought that the Virtue of *Faith*, as I have here explained and defended it, belongs only to *Philosophers* and *Scholars*. But this, I presume, is far from the Truth. The Quantity of *Knowledge* actually *gained* cannot indeed be considerable in the *Bulk* of Mankind. But the *good Dispositions* of Mind, from whence it's *Moral Worth* is deduced, are of as great Extent as any other: nay, they are frequently the *most* conspicuous in the *illiterate* Part of Mankind. *Humility* and *Learning* have long been considered as *Rivals*. And if we would search for Instances of the highest and most unreasonable *Partiality*,

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lity, we shall but too often find it intimately joined with the largest and most comprehensive *Erudition*. It is further to be considered, that Men of Learning may be influenced by *wrong Motives*. Perhaps they only want the *Fame* of Learning: perhaps they have some *selfish* View to serve: perhaps they *fear* to discover the Truth; lest the Discovery should *incapacitate* them for what *they* esteem more *valuable* than Truth. Such Men, however disqualified for the Acquisition of *true* Wisdom; yet are not disqualified for that which wears her *Masque*, and by common Eyes is *mistaken* for her.—For the *Attainment* of what is *vulgarly* called *Learning*, little more than *Diligence* can be reputed *necessary*. And when it is attained, it is often *instrumental* in producing the very *contrary* Qualities, to those which I consider as the *Sources* of *Knowledge*. The very *Pains* it costs us, is enough to give us an immoderate Value for it; and the *Singularity* of the Accomplishment raises that Value still higher. Till in a little Time we begin to think our selves incapable of all further Information: and what we *think*, we *are*.—Is it better then to *avoid* so dangerous a Qualification, and to sit down contented without it? By no means. I am not endeavouring to *depretiate* Learning. It is of great and excellent *Use* to a Mind *willing* to make a *right* Use of it. But the *best* Things in the
World

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World are liable to *Abuse*; and, when this happens, they become the *worst*.—If the Progress we make in Human Learning does not engage us to relinquish those *better Qualities*, which have been already enumerated; nor take us off from the Pursuit of *more important Truths*: if, on the contrary, *all* other Studies are pursued in constant *Subordination* to that which is the *chief* of all, the Study of our *Maker* and our *selves*—the Improvement of our *Faith* cannot but keep Pace with the Improvement of our *Understandings*; nor will it fail of producing it's genuine Effect, in making us *wiser* and *better Men*.

THE Sum of what has been said amounts to this.—That, by a very natural Figure of Speech, the Excellence of the *Cause* is often transferred to the *Effect*: That no sufficient Reason appears, why the *same* Way of speaking may not be used on the Subject *before us*: That Religious Knowledge in *general* proceeds from the *noblest Causes*, whether we consider the *Motive* on which it is pursued, or the *Means* by which it is obtained: That the Faith of a *Christian* involves these Excellencies in a still *greater Degree*: That a right Belief of *particular Doctrines* presupposes, even in our *own Times*, a considerable Share of Virtue and Discretion: That in the *earlier Ages* a *general Belief* in *Christ* deserved all the Praises which are bestowed upon it in the New

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Testament: And lastly, that the *particular Instances*, which occur *there*, contain nothing *inconsistent* with the Account here given; but, on the contrary, *confirm* and *support* it.

IT was farther affirmed that Christian Faith was not only the *Effect*, but the *Ground* of Virtue; and on this Account also *morally excellent*. But the Prosecution of this Part of my Subject will fall in under the *next Head*.-- Before I enter upon *that*, it may be proper to take Notice, that the Sense in which I have hitherto understood *Faith*, and in which I have attempted to vindicate it's *Excellence*, is not the *only* Sense which occurs in Scripture. There are *three* others in which the Signification of the Word is a little more *restrained* and *particular*. * For,

1st, BECAUSE a Belief of God's *Veracity* lies at the *Foundation* of *all* Faith whatever; therefore we sometimes find *Faith* used for the Belief of this *single Article*; and especially of God's *Faithfulness* in performing *Promises*.

2^{dly}, BECAUSE a *speculative* or *habitual* Faith will not answer the *Ends* of Faith; it has therefore been brought to signify an *actual* Knowledge, frequently *present* to the Mind, of the most important Doctrines in Religion.

3^{dly}, BECAUSE the Doctrine of a Future State

* All these Senses of the Word suppose or imply the Assent of the *Understanding*. I have taken no Notice of any *other* Senses, because they are usually attended with no Difficulty.

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State is *more* important than *any other*; *Faith* therefore signifies, yet more particularly, a *practical* Belief of this *very* Doctrine. So that to *have Faith*, according to this Interpretation, is frequently to *recollect*, carefully to *consider*, and earnestly to *regard* the Joys that are set before us in another Life.

BESIDES these Instances, in which Faith is considered *subjectively*, it is also in some Places taken *objectively*; and denotes the *Truths* themselves, either in whole or in part, which are revealed under the Gospel Dispensation.

IN *which* of these Senses the Word is to be understood, in any particular Passage, can only be determined from the *Context*.—But the *1st* Kind of Faith here mentioned is plainly *included* in that *Religious Knowledge*, which has been so particularly considered: The *2d* and *3d* have a *peculiar* Merit of their own: and the *last* is entirely foreign to our Purpose.—I conclude therefore, upon the whole, that the MORAL EXCELLENCE of *Faith*, as represented to us in *Scripture*, is seen and confessed by *Right Reason*. I ought not to dissemble that some of the best Judges have chosen to explain this Matter in a Way somewhat different from mine. Instead of *deriving* the *Excellence* of Faith from the good Dispositions of Mind, by which it is produced, they have maintained that the *Word*, which we render *Faith*, may properly signify those
Dispo-

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Dispositions themselves. To this they are led, not by observing a like Use of it in profane Writers; but from considering that this *figurative* Interpretation will, in many Places, be more *natural*, and more suitable to the *Context*.—Others again have extended the Signification of the Word, so as to take in *Obedience* to the *Laws* of the Gospel; which appears to me to be no otherwise included in *Faith*, than as every *Effect* is *virtually* included in it's *Cause*. And *this* too is a Sense only to be justified upon the same Grounds with the *preceding*.—Such a *Latitude* in interpreting Scripture is not, I think, to be admitted without *Necessity*. But if any of my Readers chuse to *enlarge* the Signification of the *Word*, rather than *deny* the intrinsic Excellence of the *Thing*; I believe it will be found that there is no *real* Difference between *their* Notion and *mine*. They acknowledge, with me, that bare *Assent* is and must be a worthless Thing. They join with me in ascribing the sole Merit to those virtuous *Actions*, which either *precede* Assent, or *follow* after it. And lastly they agree that all the Praises contained in the sacred Writings, were bestowed on the very *same* Grounds.—Whether a figurative Sense is to be ascribed to the *Word* Faith, or whether the *Praises themselves* are to be taken figuratively, is a Thing of no Consequence at all.

S E C T.

S E C T. II.

WE are taught in Scripture, that the whole Race of Mankind will finally be divided into *two* Classes; the *one* to be doomed to *everlasting Punishment*, the *other* to be made *Heirs of eternal Life*. The Words *Damnation* and *Salvation*, are commonly used to express these two contrary States: for as *Condemnation* infers *Punishment*; so a *Release* from *Punishment*, which is the proper Idea of *Salvation*, draws after it, by divine Appointment, a Participation of *endless Happiness*. We are not allowed to suppose an *intermediate* State. Such a Supposition would offer the greatest Violence, not only to *particular* Passages, but to the whole *Tenour* of the *Gospel*.-- By *Salvation* then, in *general*, is *only* to be understood *a State of future and perpetual Bliss*; and whatever procures us *Admission* to such a State, is properly a *Means of Salvation*.

BUT the same *Scriptures* have also assured us, *Reason* itself bearing them Witness, that the Happiness to be enjoyed in a Future State admits of great and endless *Variety*. The *House* of God contains *many Mansions*, suited to the different *Capacities*, and the different *Merits* of their respective Inhabitants. On this

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this Account *Salvation* is an *indeterminate* Thing; involving in itself *all* Degrees of Bliss, from the *highest* to the *lowest*, which are within the Reach of *any* Part of *Mankind*: and whatever procures us a *higher* Station in the World to come, whatever conduces to the *Improvement* of our Prospects beyond the Grave, may justly be considered as a *Means of Salvation*.

THAT the *Faith* of a *Christian* is in an *eminent* Degree *productive* of these valuable Effects, and, in some Sense, *sufficient* for their Production, it is my present Business to maintain and prove.

OUR *first* Inquiry then will be, Whether a Belief of the Doctrines of Christianity conduces to the *Security* of our Future Happiness? whether such a Belief renders it more *probable*, that *some Place* will be allotted us in the Kingdom of God?—Before we can settle this Point, we must first be determined by what *Rule* Men's final State, either of Happiness or Misery, will be fixed and ascertained at the last Day? Not that the Inquiry before us will require a *particular* Determination. It is sufficient for our Purpose, if we can resolve this single Question, Whether our *Condition* in the *other* World depends *solely* on our *Conduct* in *this*? whether any Thing else, besides

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sides * *Moral Improvements* can give us a Claim to *Everlasting Life*?—Now this Question we may surely answer without the least Hesitation. That we shall be judged by our *Works*, and our *Works only*, is the uniform Voice both of *Scripture* and *Reason*. I do not say that eternal Life is purely the *Result* of our own *Merit*: I only affirm that *good Works* are the *sole Condition*, the *necessary Qualification*; *without* which that *Gift of God* cannot possibly be bestowed, and *with* which it will not be refused.

It would be deviating too far from my present Purpose to enter into a Detail of the *Proofs* on this Head. Especially as the Truth of my Assertion is not likely to be called in Question

* Some Readers may perhaps want to be reminded that *Christian Morality* is a very different Thing from *Social Virtue*. It does indeed include that in a very *high* Degree: but it *also* extends to *all* our *Natural Obligations*, whether respecting the *Deity* or *ourselves*. Not only so, but it comprehends a Variety of *new Duties*, discovered to us by the Light of *Revelation*. Whatever our *Reason*, as improved by *Christianity*, recommends to our *Choice*, must certainly be esteemed a Part of *Morality*. For, I presume, this Word signifies a *right Conduct* of our *Actions*, not in *one* Respect, but in *all*.—When therefore I speak of *Virtue*, *Moral Duty*, &c. I would always be understood to take in a *Desire* and *Endeavour* to inform ourselves rightly concerning the *Revealed Will* of God; a Compliance with the *Positive Institutions* of the Gospel; and, in short, an unlimited *Obedience* to the *Laws of Christ*. Whoever allows, what, I think, no *Christian* denies; that a *Legislative Authority* was committed to our *Saviour* by *God himself*, and yet *wilfully* disobeys him in *any Particular*, is certainly guilty of an *immoral Action*. To say otherwise would be to make *Rebellion* against the *Governor* of the *World* no Breach of *Morality*.

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Question by those Persons with whom I mean to contend. Let me therefore, for the Sake of Brevity, be allowed to suppose, *without Proof*, That the Judge of the World is a *just Judge*. That one essential Part of Justice is a right *Distribution* of Happiness and Misery ; and lastly, That distributive Justice regards *solely* the *Moral Worth* of the Objects with which it is concerned.—These are Principles drawn from *other Sciences* ; Principles of *Morality* and *Natural Religion* : and, as such, have a *Right* to be admitted, without further Evidence.

THIS Foundation being once laid, we shall have a firm and immoveable Support for the Notion we are endeavouring to establish. For it seems, according to this Notion, that *Means of Salvation* and *Means of Virtue* are, in Effect, one and the same Thing ; these two being *inseparably connected*. The Question then is reduced within narrower Bounds, and exposed more distinctly to our View.—It is, in short, only this, What Connection between *Faith* and *Morality* ? between *Belief* and *Practice* ? between embracing the *Religion*, and obeying the *Laws* of our Redeemer ? *Whatever* Degree of Perfection in Virtue is made requisite to our *Admission* into Heaven, is that Degree more *likely* to be obtained by an *Infidel* or a *Christian* ? If the latter, it follows that the Knowledge of the Doctrines of Christianity

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Christianity *must* be conducive to our Salvation.

BUT our Inquiry may be contracted one Degree further ; by observing that all Moral Obligations are *relative* to the *Capacities* of the Agent. From whence it follows that Men's *Obligations* and *Knowledge* keep Pace with each other ; and that the *former* cannot extend, in any Instance, beyond the *latter*. If therefore any Part of Mankind have been *unavoidably* deficient in the *Knowledge* of their Duty, a proportionable Deficiency in the *Practice* of it would, in that Case, be without *Blame*. Such Persons therefore cannot, in those Instances, be fit Objects of *Punishment*. It is therefore impossible that their *utter Ruin* should, in *any* Degree, depend on these *involuntary* Transgressions. I pretend not to set them on a *Level* with those who have known *more*, and deserved *better* ; but I cannot think it credible that their *final* State of Happiness or Misery should depend on the Performance of such Conditions, which they could not possibly *know* to be *required* of them, and were under *no Obligation* to fulfil.

THE Question before us is now reduced to this—Does our Belief of Christianity render it more probable, that we shall be *sincere* and *conscientious* in the Discharge of our Duty? that we shall be *careful* to obey the Divine Will to the best of our *Knowledge*, and the best

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best of our *Power*? If it does *this*, it plainly conduces to our Everlasting Happiness.—Now this, I presume, will not be denied by him who considers these two Things. *First*, That Christianity strengthens the *Motives*; and *Secondly*, That it supplies the *Means* to *such* an *Obedience*, as I am here considering. I shall be very brief upon both these Particulars, because they have been fully handled by others.

I. THE great *Motive* to an uniform Course of Virtue, is the Greatness and Certainty of it's Future *Rewards*: and every Degree of fresh *Information* adds fresh *Weight* to that Motive. Now whatever adds Weight to the *Motives* of Religion, increases our *Desire* of becoming religious; and whatever increases this Desire, increases the *Probability* of our acting *religiously*.—Will it then be said, that the Christian Religion has yielded us *no* Information on this Subject? It cannot be thought; it will not be pretended. For *Natural Reason*, when improved to it's utmost Perfection, can afford us very little Certainty, either as to the *Nature*, or *Duration* of the Happiness to be enjoyed after Death. That this Life is the *only* State of Probation; That the Life to come will be free from *Pain* and free from *Fear*; That the Blessings it contains are immensely *great*, exceeding every Thing we can *conceive* or *imagine*; That all past Offences will be *utterly* forgot, and *entirely* forgiven; That
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we shall enjoy the Society of Beings *perfectly* virtuous, and be favoured with a more intimate *Knowledge* of the *Deity* himself; and lastly, That this happy State will continue *for ever*, and *improve* for ever—These are Doctrines purely *Scriptural*; and yet tending, in the highest Degree, to allure and invite us to the Discharge of our Duty.—We might easily extend these Observations to the *contrary* Motive; that, I mean, which arises from the *Fear of Punishment*. But, if what has been said be not sufficient, nothing of *this Sort* can be sufficient. I shall therefore conclude, without further Hesitation, that the Man who is *animated* by the Motives of *Christianity*, is in a *fairer* Way to obtain *Salvation*, than he who is left to the *Direction* of his own *Reason*.

2. ALL the *Danger* of transgressing our Duty arises either from *Inattention* to the Dictates of *Reason*, or from the prevailing Influence of our *Appetites* and *Passions*; and whatever provides a *Remedy* for these Evils, will proportionably *diminish* that Danger. If therefore the *Faith* of a *Christian* be the *Means* of procuring such a Remedy, it is also a Means of preserving us from *Sin*.—Now we *think* we have sufficient Ground from *Scripture*, to suppose that the Influence of the *Divine Spirit* is either *confined* to *Believers*, or communicated to them in a *peculiar* and *sig-*

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nal Manner. We are further persuaded that this *Spirit* frequently *suggests* to our Minds those very *Motives* which we are apt to overlook : and at the same Time *abates* the Force of the contrary *Temptations* ; by moderating the Violence of our corrupt *Affections*, and bringing them into Subjection to the Law of *Reason*. If we are mistaken in ascribing *these* Effects to the Spirit ; yet, in general, we are very sure that he aids and encourages us in the Performance of our Duty, and renders it less difficult to be performed.—If Faith then, by Divine Appointment, draws along with it *these* Advantages, it may certainly be considered as a *Means* of *Salvation*.

BUT the Belief of Christianity not only conduces to the *Security* of our Future Happiness, but also to the *Increase* and *Improvement* of it.—Not only *Happiness*, but the *Degree* of Happiness depends solely on *Moral Qualifications*. As might easily be shewn, both from the Nature of the Thing, and likewise from the express Declarations of Scripture. Whatever Reasons determine the Deity to make a *good* Man *happy*, the same Reasons will undoubtedly determine him to make a *better* Man *more happy*.—Supposing then, for the present, an Infidel and a Believer *equally* upright and *sincere* ; I ask, which will be the *better* Man ? Certainly He, whose religious Knowledge is most *extensive*. For in Proportion

tion to the *Extent* of his Knowledge will be the *Number* of his Obligations: and therefore, supposing him *honest*, the *Number* of his *Virtues* will be in the *same* Proportion. If then our religious Knowledge be greatly *extended* by the *Christian Revelation*, it follows that the *Christian Revelation* is a *Means* of *Moral Improvement*.—I do not say that an Infidel deserves *Blame*, for not discharging *imperceptible* Obligations; which are indeed, strictly speaking, *no* Obligations *at all*. But I maintain that a right Use and Improvement of *ten Talents* deserves more *Praise*, and more *Favour* too, than a proportionable Improvement of only *five*. And he who shall assert the contrary, must maintain that the *Virtue* of the most *ignorant* Soul upon *Earth* is, or may be, equal to that of an *Archangel*.

How far the *Doctrines* of Christianity exceed the *utmost Efforts* of Human Reason, I shall not stay to inquire. It is enough for my Purpose that *some* of those *Doctrines* lay us under *new* Obligations; that *others* strengthen the *old*; and all of them uniformly tend to *make the Good more Good*. I am the more willing to stop here, both because these *Matters* have been sufficiently explained by others, and also because I am under no *Necessity* of resting the whole *Stress* of my Cause on this *single Point*.—I have hitherto only compared Christianity with such an *imaginary Improvement*

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ment of Natural Reason, as in *Fact* never subsisted. And yet, even on this Supposition, I fear not to pronounce it a *Means* of *Virtue*, and, by Consequence, a *Means* of *Salvation*. But to judge rightly of the mighty Efficacy of our Religion in bringing us *to God*, we should consider the *actual* State, both of the *Jewish* and *Gentile* World, before the Coming of *Christ*; and set *that* in Opposition to the *new* Scene of Things, which was introduced by the *Gospel*.

AND surely it will readily be granted, that, amidst the numberless Errors and Corruptions, both in Religion and Morality, which then prevailed over the whole Earth, great was the *Danger* of Men's neglecting their Duty.—The *Jews* themselves had fallen into gross Mistakes: and Mistakes too which might easily prove *fatal*. For even *Mistakes* may be fatal. Such I am sure are all those, which lead us to expect the Favour of God, on any other Terms than *inward Righteousness*. When a Man is once brought to believe that Virtue is *unnecessary*; he will be strongly tempted to *desert* it on every Occasion. His *Reason* indeed will still *approve* it; for otherwise he might desert it without *Blame*. But he will knowingly and frequently *contradict* his *Reason*, when it is no longer connected with his *Interest*.—Now we find it to have been a prevailing Opinion among the Jewish Nation,
That

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That a Man is justified by *the Works of the Law* : That *outward* and *legal* may supply the Place of *inward* Purity ; and, That, in Consideration of an exact and punctual Performance of an infinite Variety of *Rites* and *Ceremonies*, the *weightier Matters* might be safely omitted. This unhappy and unaccountable Prejudice had not only *tainted* the Manners of the People ; had not only deformed the *outward Face* of Religion ; but diffused it's Poyson to the very *Vitals*. *The whole Head was sick, and the whole Heart faint* : and, indeed, the extreme Difficulty of the *Cure* was a strong Proof that the Malady had taken *fast* Hold, and sunk *deep* into the Constitution.—This *Cure*, great as it was, was the genuine Effect of *Christian Faith* ; which taught them the Vanity of seeking after God in any other Way, or by any other Means, than *Repentance from dead Works, and a new Life unto Holiness*. A Doctrine of such signal Importance, and such powerful Influence ; that had our Religion taught this, and this *only*, it might yet have deserved, with the utmost Propriety, the glorious Title given it by the Apostle ; who calls it *the Power of God to Salvation unto every one that believeth*.

I WOULD not swell this Inquiry to an unnecessary Length, and therefore have selected *one* Instance out of *many*, in order to shew that the Salvation of the *Jews* was rendered

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far more *secure* by their embracing the Doctrines of *Christianity*.—Should I expatiate upon the Follies of the *Gentile* World, and point out the Dangers *they* were exposed to, with regard to their Everlasting Happiness, the Subject would be almost infinite ; at least, as copious as the Errors and Absurdities of Human Kind. Some, we know, pretended to doubt of the *natural* Difference, between *Good* and *Evil* ; others disowned the *moral* Difference between *Virtue* and *Vice* : and no inconsiderable Sect, sprung too from the immortal *Socrates*, openly referred all their Actions to the Attainment of *Bodily Pleasures*. Some denied a *God*, others a *Providence*, others a *Future State* of Rewards and Punishments. Many Persons who acknowledged the *Truth* of these Things, yet *explained* them in such a *Manner*, as to render them of no Use or Efficacy in the Conduct of their *Lives* : and many more * *divided* Morality from Religion ; leaving the *former* destitute of *Support*, and the *latter* empty of all real *Benefit*, either to the Owner or to Mankind in general. Were I disposed to crowd my Page with *Quotations*, I could not wish for a more favourable Opportunity.

* I am far from intending in this, or any other Place, to represent Morality and Religion as the *same Thing*. I only plead for an *Union*, not a *Coincidence*. *Authority* and *Reason* are surely distinct Principles : and therefore a *Regard* to the *former* should by no means be confounded with a *Regard* to the *latter*.

portunity. Since I should have little to do, but to transcribe the first Places that occurred either in the *Writings* of the Antient Philosophers, or the *Accounts* of those, whose *Writings* have long since perished. Whether we consult the one, or the other, we shall find that *Errors* of the most enormous Size shoot up in every Page.—Even the *Divine Plato*, who was read with *Rapture* for many Ages; and whose *single* Judgment appeared to *Cicero* to outweigh the *united* Verdict of all the Rest; this *God*, as he was *then* entitled, is found at last to have been a mere *Visionary*: a Man who concealed his Absurdities under a false *Elevation* of Thought; and varnished over the *Weakness* of his Arguments, with all the Colours which a lively Imagination, and a beautiful Language were capable of affording.—*Cicero* himself, who had taken so much Pains in examining and *explaining* the various Systems of Philosophy then in the World; yet seems to have been strangely in the Dark, on some of the *clearest* and most *important* Subjects. Though I mean not to descend to Particulars, yet I cannot forbear observing that the unnatural *Separation*, I just took Notice of between *Religion* and *Morality* appears no where more plainly, than in the most celebrated *Writings* of the *Roman Orator*. That great Man, the greatest perhaps that ever lived without the Light of Revela-

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tion, seems not to have *known*, or not to have *regarded* so plain a Principle as this, *That the Fear of the Lord is the Beginning of Wisdom.*—The Errors I have already hinted at were *Philosophical* Errors. Was the Condition of the *Populace* much *better*? In *some* Respects perhaps it was: but in *many* others yet *worse*. A Multitude of Gods, weak, vicious, changeful Beings, was the great Article of the Popular Creed. And this Article *alone* must do inexpressible *Harm*. But when to this are added the great *Uncertainty* and *Confusion* they were in, even on those Points where they had a Glimmering of Truth; the great *Reliance* they had, in common with the Jews, on outward Rites and superstitious Practises; and all the other Absurdities of their traditional Theology: I presume, it is evident beyond Contradiction, that they were very imperfectly *secured* against disobeying the Law of their *Reason*.—*That* Religion therefore, which *saved* the *Gentiles* from the Influence of such pernicious and dangerous Errors, was to them a *Means* of *Salvation*. It made them virtuous, and *therefore* happy.

BUT let us now suppose an Unbeliever, whether a *Jew* or a *Heathen*, truly *conscientious* in the Discharge of his Duty—yet how greatly would he fall short of *Christian Perfection*! We have before considered how this Matter stood, supposing Reason improved
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to it's *utmost* Pitch. We are now considering the different Degrees of Virtue, which may be supposed to have *actually* existed, before and since the Coming of *Christ*. And here surely is no Room for Comparison.—I will but touch very slightly, first on *Jewish*, and then on *Gentile* Righteousness.—Whatever the *Jews* might have known, their Notions, in *Fact*, seem to have been miserably deficient. They neither understood their *Maker*, nor their *Fellow* Creatures; neither the *spiritual* Worship, which was acceptable to the *former*, nor the *Universal Benevolence*, which was due to the *latter*—Amidst this *general* Depravation both of *religious* and *moral* Sentiments, we can hardly suppose that *particular Persons*, however honest and well-disposed, would be able to procure a right Information. The Thing at least must be extremely difficult, considering the Force of Prejudice and the Contagion of Example. And so long as they *continued* in this *Ignorance*; it was little less than *impossible*, to make any considerable *Proficiency* in Virtue.—But now so great is the Alteration introduced by the Gospel, that, upon these *capital* Points, it is scarce possible for a Christian to judge amiss. Not, I mean, without a wilful *Inadvertence*, or a criminal *Partiality*. From whence it follows that a *Jew*, by embracing Christianity, put himself into a *Capacity* of arriving at *greater* Perfection in *Goodness*;

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ness; and, by consequence, of obtaining a larger Share of *Bliss* and *Glory* in a Future State.

IF such was the Condition of the *chosen* People of God, what shall we think of those, who were *Strangers to the Covenant*? Amidst all the Errors and Corruptions of the *Jews*, at the Time of our Saviour's Appearance, *Idolatry* however could find no Place. The Belief and Worship of the *one* God had been carefully and religiously preserved among them, ever since their Return from the *Babylonian* Captivity. Whereas the Heathens not only erred in the *Kind* but in the *Object* of their Devotions; and this too almost without *Exception*. The *wisest* as well as the *weakest* concurred with one Consent in the *Worship* of a Multitude of *imaginary* Deities, and the *Neglect* of the *True God*.—Whatever then may be said of the *Perfection* of *Natural Religion*, if it be true *at all*, it is true only in *Theory*. If we form our Judgment from *Fact* and *Experience*, we shall find that simple, unassisted *Nature* had either left Men without any Religion at all, or engaged them, at best, in a *false* Religion. I do not at present recollect one Instance of a Person not utterly *irreligious*, who refused to join in the *Idolatry* of his Country. If they did this *against* their Conscience; they wanted the *Motives* of *Christianity*, to draw them back to their Duty:

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Duty : but if, as we are supposing, Men were Idolaters upon *Principle* ; they then wanted the *Doctrines* of *Christianity*, to remove their Errors, and set them into a right Way. In either Case they were *saved by Faith* ; because, through *Faith in Christ*, they were recovered from the grossest *Superstition* and *Folly*, to the *Love* and *Fear* of Almighty God.

To pursue these Reflections through every Part of Moral Duty would perhaps be going too far. I shall content myself with observing that the *Heathens* in general seem to have had no Notion of that *unlimited Benevolence*, and that *unspotted Purity*, which are the Marks and Badges of the Christian Profession.— Leaving this Observation to support itself, I shall now venture to conclude, from what has been said, that a *Good Christian* is many Degrees superior to a *Good Heathen* ; and therefore that *Faith in Christ* contributes in an eminent Degree to the *Improvement* of our Future Happiness.

It may be of Use to reflect a little on what has been said, that the entire Force of the Argument may be taken in at one View.—I undertook to prove that the *Faith* of a *Christian* conduces both to the *Security*, and the *Improvement* of our Happiness in a Life to come. For this Purpose it was necessary to shew, First, that a Christian is of all Men the most likely to be *sincere* in the Discharge of his Duty :

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Duty : Secondly, that *supposing* him sincere, he will arrive at the greatest *Degree* of *Perfection* in *Virtue*. The former *secures* ; the latter *improves* his Reward. — Each of these Points I have considered in two different Lights : for *first* I have shewn the Advantage of *Faith*, preferably to the *highest* Attainments of natural Reason ; and secondly in Comparison of the *actual* State of the World before the Coming of *Christ*. In the *former* Sense *Faith* is a Means of Salvation to *us*, and to *all Christians*. The *latter* more *peculiarly* belongs to those Persons who were converted to Christianity in the first Ages of the Gospel. And it is most frequently in this *latter* Sense, that Men's Salvation is in *Scripture* ascribed to *Faith*. But these, as well as many other Declarations in the New Testament, tho' more *emphatically* true of the first Christians, are yet in *some Sense* to be extended to *all* the Followers of *Christ* in all Ages.

It is no small Confirmation of the Reasoning I have used, that *Experience* and *History* seem to be on the same Side. The great Change of Manners, which was *usually* effected by Men's Conversion to Christianity, is a strong Proof of the Extent of it's Influence. And for the *Reality* of such a Change, we have the concurrent Testimony of *Friends* and

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and *Enemies*. * The very Persecutors themselves, at least in the earliest Ages, could not forbear *acknowledging* their *Virtue*, while they *condemned* their *Religion*.—But our own Writers represent a *Saint* and a *Christian* as, generally speaking, the *same Thing*: and, notwithstanding a few groundless Calumnies, they boldly assert their Freedom from the prevailing Vices of the Age, and challenge their Adversaries to find a *Man* among them, who was guilty of any *one* notorious Crime. The Passages to this Purpose in *Justin* and *Tertullian* are too well known to be cited.—In the New Testament itself, *Faith* and *Repentance* are always considered as Things inseparably connected, and *mutually* productive of each other. In short a Profelyte to the *Gospel* was a Profelyte to *Virtue*, and therefore intitled to the *Reward* of *Virtue*.

AFTER what has been said, I shall add but a very few Words with regard to the *Sufficiency* of Christian Faith. If it only produce those good *Effects*, which it is naturally *fitted* to produce, it will certainly be *able* to *save* our Souls. But if these Effects are prevented by our *Carelessness* or *Obstinacy*; we cannot be said to fail of Salvation through the *Insufficiency*

* It would be Loss of Time to insert Passages that have been so often quoted. Let me just observe that *Pliny* and *Lucian* (de Mort. Peregr.) are unexceptionable Witnesses; the former being a Persecutor, the latter a *Derider* of Christianity.

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ficiency of *Faith*, but through our own Folly and *Misconduct* in neglecting to make a right *Use* of so excellent and *effectual* a Means.—Be that as it may, *Faith* without *Works* is expressly declared to be insignificant: and therefore cannot be esteemed *sufficient* in any other Sense, than as it naturally and generally tends to our Growth and Improvement in true Goodness.—But as it is probable that among the first Converts to the Gospel, it *seldom* failed of producing this Effect; it is the less to be wondered that St. *Paul* considers it as *including* in itself all the Virtues of Christianity, and giving a *Title* to the Rewards of the Gospel.

I AM sensible the Generality of Christians have supposed a Connection between *Faith* and *Salvation* of a very different Kind from what has been here explained. To which they have been led by the seeming *Opposition*, which every where appears in St. *Paul's* Writings between *Faith* and *Good Works*. The Apostle discovers on all Occasions a particular Zeal on this Head. He does not say that *Faith* saves us by *making* us *righteous*, which is the Doctrine here maintained: but that our *Faith* shall be *imputed* to us for *Righteousness*. He seems, in very many Places, to ascribe our *Salvation* *wholly* to the *former*: in others he evidently considers it as a Sort of *Equivalent* for our Defects in the *latter*.—This is a real
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and great Difficulty. But I apprehend nothing can be inferred from it, except this, that *St. Paul* is not yet perfectly *understood*. Whatever be his Meaning, of this we are very sure, that he *could* not mean what has been often *imagined*. He could not mean that the Governor of the World would deal *unjustly* with his Creatures; or that Justice would allow him to *distribute* Happiness, without Regard to the *Merit* of the Recipients; or lastly, that *Faith* only was meritorious, and *Good Works* of no Value at all. This, I say, he *could* not mean: because it is contrary to *Right Reason*; because it is contrary to the Declarations of *St. James*; because it is contrary to his *own* Declarations. On *Supposition* therefore that the Difficulty alleged were really *unanswerable*, it proves nothing but our own *Ignorance*; nothing but, what every one allows, the Difficulty of interpreting *St. Paul's* Epistles.

BUT after all, perhaps *these* Passages are *less* obscure than has been *supposed*—It has been justly observed by those Writers who attempt to *reconcile* the two Apostles, that in numberless Places the *Works* spoken of by *St. Paul* were nothing else but the Performance of the *Ceremonial Law*: whereas *Faith* draws after it, by *natural* Consequence, a Train of Moral and Christian Virtues. In *this* Sense therefore it is in no Degree surprizing, that Salvation

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is ascribed to *Faith* rather than *Works*. Nay it is perfectly agreeable to the Scheme here laid down. And this Consideration alone will greatly *diminish* the *Number* of those Passages which may be alleged against us. — But still, it must be owned, there *are* Passages, in which *Moral Virtues* seem to be excluded from *any Share* in effecting our Salvation ; and the *whole* of it ascribed to *Faith only*. Concerning this Point I would affirm nothing rashly ; not, I mean, as to the *Sense* of the Apostle. But the following Account I judge most agreeable to *Reason*, and to *other Parts* of the *Sacred Writings*. And it seems to me that the Passages in Question will fairly and naturally *allow* us to interpret them in Conformity thereto.

THOUGH the Happiness prepared for us in a Future State will be exactly *proportioned* to our *Good Deserts*, as Reason and Equity require ; yet these Deserts, considered in themselves, give us no *Claim* or *Title* to Happiness. The Blessings we enjoy, even in *this* Life, are strictly and properly the *Gift of God* ; and indeed, setting aside the *Performance* of *Promises*, *Expletory* Justice can have no Place at all in his *Benefits* to his Creatures. Were any Man suffered to pass *all* his Days upon Earth, without *once* tasting of Grief or Pain ; to such a Person, however *innocent*, however *dutiful* to his Maker, it could surely be esteemed no
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Injury, should God deprive him of his Life and his *Being* together. How such a Proceeding might consist with *Wisdom* and *Goodness* is indeed another Question ; but in regard to *Justice* the Case is quite clear.—And if Creatures of a *mixed* and *irregular* Character have a suitable Mixture of *Bliss* and *Woe*, the Case is still the same ; here is evidently no Room for Complaint or Murmuring : I mean, when we consider *Individual* Persons, without reflecting on their *Comparative* Goodness. If indeed we do this, *distributive* Justice will require a more *regular* State of Things, where every Man may be *happy* or *miserable* in proportion as he has been *virtuous* or *vicious*.—But there is no Occasion for such a State to be *much* superior to *this*, either in *Degree* or *Duration*. Nothing further is requisite, but that Goods and Evils may be more equably *disposed* : that, when all Accounts come to be fairly ballanced, no Man may appear to have been a *Gainer* by his *Vice*, or a *Losser* by his *Virtue* ; but, on the contrary, the *best* Men to have been the *most* favoured by the Governor of the World.—So far will *Justice* require ; and no farther. Whatever Prospect we have beyond this, *it is the Gift of God through Jesus Christ*. It is entirely owing to God's free Bounty, that our Future Happiness will be immensely *great*, and infinitely *durable*. It is more *especially* owing to his *Mercy*,
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through Christ, that our weak and imperfect Obedience, frequently interrupted by wilful *Transgressions*, and seldom free from lamentable *Infirmities*, shall yet be accepted in the same Manner, as if it was *intire* and *perfect*; all Offences being *cancelled*, upon our sincere *Repentance*, and all Penalties beyond the Grave being effectually, and for ever *removed*.—This being the Case; the Apostle might surely affirm, that we are not *justified* by our own *Righteousness*. He might affirm this, because he was ready to support it with this incontestable Proof; that *we have all sinned, and come short of the Glory of God*. Had our Righteousness been free from all *Defects*; it might have been thought sufficient for our *Justification*: I mean, our *Exemption* from future Sufferings. But as we are all *guilty before God*, our Title to Salvation *must* be derived from a quite different Source. And this Source is evidently no other, than the all-sufficient *Merits* of our *Redeemer*; *through whom we have received Remission of Sins, and are made Heirs of Everlasting Life*.

BUT if *Good Works* be not the *Cause* of our Salvation, yet are they not the proper, the necessary *Qualification*?—If they are, *no Man* can be *saved*. For no Man can pretend to be *so qualified*: because, as I have already observed, no Man can plead *Universal Righteousness*. And *this it is*, which *St. Paul* means by

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by *Works*, whenever he uses that Word in a *moral Sense* *.—Still it remains to be answered, how our *Faith* can be *imputed* to us for *Righteousness*? But I hope the Answer cannot now be difficult. *Faith* in *Christ* is naturally productive of *Evangelical Obedience*. It induces us to *accept* the gracious Offers of the Gospel, and to *comply* with the Terms proposed in it; and, by *this Means*, enables us to *obtain* the *Promised Rewards*.—St. *Paul* then is never to be understood, as opposing *Faith* to *Gospel Righteousness*: since *that* can no way intitle us to *Christ's Heavenly Kingdom*, but by making us *good Subjects* to him upon *Earth*. But *Faith* is opposed to *universal* and *perfect Righteousness*, and declared *sufficient* to supply the *Want* of it. In short, such a Belief of the *Doctrines*, as makes us obedient to the *Laws* of the Gospel, shall atone for all our Offences against the more rigorous Law of *Right Reason*.—St. *James*, on the other hand, means by *Good Works*, a sincere Obedience to the *Evangelical Law*; and he therefore affirms, with great Reason, that *Faith without Works is dead*.

It may be proper to take Notice, while I am upon this Subject, that, however the *Moral Excellence* of Faith depends on the *Man-*

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* So in *other Places* he understands by *Works*, *Universal Obedience* to the *Jewish Law*; such an Obedience as is not consistent with any the *minuteſt* Deviation; much less with *enormous Sins*, tho' afterwards repented of and forsaken.

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ner in which it is acquired, yet the *Good Effects* of it *do not*. A Belief of the Doctrines of Christianity, tho' perhaps *merely* the Effect of Education, and *altogether* unsupported by rational Arguments, may yet be of great and excellent *Use* in *enlightening* Men's *Minds* and *reforming* their *Manners*.—*Capacity* and *Opportunity* for a diligent Examination may make it our *Duty* to *try* the Principles of our Religion, and to *search* them to the very Bottom. But I am forced to agree with a *late Writer*, however I may differ from him in other Things, that such an Inquiry is not *ordinarily* to be *expected*. The Bulk of Mankind have in all Ages taken their Religion upon *Trust*. This may have been *partly* their own *Fault* : but, in *some Degree*, it cannot well be otherwise.—Should any one try the Experiment with a rude, honest, illiterate *Christian*, and lay before him, in as plain a Manner as possible, the Evidences *for* and *against* his Religion ; he might indeed *perplex*, but he would find it very difficult to *inform* him. Such a Procedure could have no other Effect with Men unus'd to Thought and Reflection, but only to *unsettle* all their *Principles*, and to tear up their *Prejudices* and their *Virtue* together.—If it be thought safer for such Persons only to study the Evidence on the *Side* of Revelation, this can by no means amount to a *rational Search* ; since,
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right or wrong, they are *sure* to be *convinced*.—After all it *must* be confessed that the State and Circumstances of the lower Part of the World do not usually *qualify* them for Researches of this Nature. The *Authority* of Wise and Good Men is often the *best* Argument they are *capable* of discerning: and yet *this* Argument would hold, with *equal* Strength, for *any* Established Religion, that ever existed.—But notwithstanding the Generality of Christians believe on weak and insufficient Grounds; notwithstanding many of them have acquired their Faith without any Merit of their own: yet so long as their *Belief* has the *same* Influence on their *Practice*, the *Efficacy* of that *Practice* can thereby suffer no Diminution. Though their *Faith* be less meritorious, yet the *Virtue* springing from it will, on that Account, be neither less *valuable*, nor less *rewarded*.

I HAVE only to add that *Faith*, in a more *restrained* Sense, is sometimes considered as the *Means of Salvation*.—That this Word frequently signifies an *actual* Reflection upon God's *Promises*, and a *firm* Belief that he will certainly *perform* them, is what I have already observed in the preceding Section. — In this Sense the Proposition I am now maintaining is more *peculiarly* true; both because our Opinion of God's *Veracity* eminently conduces to our moral Improvement; and because *no*

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Opinions can influence our *Actions*, unless they are frequently present to our Minds. — Upon the whole, I presume it sufficiently appears, that *Faith* is the best Means to make us *holy*, and by consequence, to make us *happy*: that, though it will not work in us *Universal Righteousness*; it is sufficient to engage our Compliance with the gentler Terms of the *Gospel*, and therefore sufficient to procure *Salvation*.

S E C T. III.

N ECESSITY is a *relative* Word; implying an inseparable *Connection* either natural or factitious, between the *Terms* so related. To affirm therefore that *Faith* is necessary, is a Manner of speaking not sufficiently determinate. Before it can be known what *Truth* there is in such an Affirmation, the particular *Ends* must first be specified, to which this Necessity is supposed to belong. — Now we may say, in general, that *Faith* is necessary for our *Admission* into *Christ's Kingdom*; either his Kingdom upon *Earth*, or his *heavenly Kingdom*. In other Words thus; Without *Faith* in *Christ* we can neither enter into *Covenant* with him, nor enjoy the *Benefits*

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fits of that Covenant: we cannot obtain the *peculiar Privileges* of his Church and People, either in *this Life*, or the *Life to come*. These being evidently *distinct Ends*, will require a distinct and separate Consideration.

THE Privileges peculiar to the Members of the Christian Church, during their *Continuance* here on *Earth*, are either *external* or *internal*. A Man is said to be admitted to the *outward Privileges* of the Church, when he is suffered to partake in her *public Worship*, and to join with her in a *public Observance* of the *positive Institutions* of *Jesus Christ*. The *inward Advantages* belonging to Christians are those powerful *Assistances* of the Holy Spirit, which our Lord himself has graciously promised to his own peculiar *Flock* and *People*. Both the one and the other are *Means of Grace*, that is *Means of Improvement in Christian Virtue*, and indeed receive their *whole Value* from this single Consideration.—By what *Rules*, and in what *Measures* the Spirit of God is communicated to *Believers*, and how large a *Share* of Faith is requisite to *entitle* us to it; are Points neither easy, nor *needful* to be determined. If we apply to the *Scriptures*, we shall only meet with *general Declarations*; if we apply to *Reason*, we shall soon be convinced, that these Things are entirely out of her *Province*—I shall only, therefore, consider the *Faith* of a *Christian*, as it is

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relative to the outward Privileges of Church-Communion: or, still more particularly, as it is previously requisite in those Persons who come to be baptized; since the Rite of Baptism is introductory to the rest, and is the outward Sign, appointed by Christ himself, both of our Entrance into his Church, and our Participation of all it's Benefits. — To avoid needless Perplexity, I meddle not with the Dispute about Infant-Baptism. I would only enquire into the necessary Qualifications, in Persons of maturer Age, for Admission to the Gospel-Covenant.

I HAVE hitherto spoken of Faith *indeterminately*; the Nature of my Subject not demanding any Thing fixed and particular. As Faith in general is *morally excellent*, and highly *conducive* to our *Everlasting Welfare*; so different *Degrees* of Faith will be *proportionably* excellent, and *proportionably* conducive to the same End. When all other Things are supposed equal, greater Faith will always be an Argument of greater *Virtue*: and, on the other hand, both our *Virtue* here, and our *Happiness* hereafter, will not fail to receive fresh Improvement from *every Addition* of true Faith.—But when Faith is considered as a *necessary Condition*, some determinate *Quantity* of Faith must needs be understood. For whatever Degree is *sufficient*, more than that cannot be *necessary*; and whatever Degree

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gree is *necessary*, *less* than that will not be *sufficient*. We are therefore to inquire what is the *lowest* Degree of Faith, which is sufficient to intitle a Man to Admission into the Christian Church; since that, and that only, is *necessary* for this Purpose.

NOW the Necessity of Faith must either arise from the Declarations and Practise of *Christ* and his *Apostles*, or from the *Nature* of the Thing itself. What is neither requisite in *itself*, nor *made* requisite by them, may certainly be pronounced *unnecessary*.—I should begin with the Necessity deducible from *Scripture*. But in this Part of my Inquiry I am, in a great Measure, *prevented* by *Mr. Locke's Reasonableness of Christianity*. Whatever may be thought of the *Inferences* he would deduce from it, yet his *general Doctrine* is undeniably plain: I mean, that nothing was required of the first Profelytes of the Gospel, but to believe that *Jesus was a true Prophet*. Not one *Command*, not one *Precedent* has yet been produced on the contrary Side. Whatever Reasons therefore may have been invented, in later Ages, for requiring a more *explicit* Faith, the *Scripture* teaches no such Thing; and therefore ought not to be charged with the Iniquity or Absurdity of Human Impositions: I mean, on *Supposition* that the Arguments of our Adversaries have all that Weight which they themselves pretend.

THAT

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THAT no Man ought to be admitted into Covenant with *Christ*, who denies the Truth and Authority of his *Mission*, is surely a most *reasonable* Demand. But as this has never been contested, it would be lost Labour to enter upon the Proof of it.—I shall only observe that the *same* Unbelief, which disqualifies a Man for *Admission* into the Church, equally disqualifies him for *Continuance* in it. The Church therefore is fully justified in openly rejecting such Members, as have cast off their *first Faith*.

BUT though I am forced to agree with the Author above-mentioned that nothing further than this can be *directly* inferred from *Scripture*; yet I shall by no means agree with him that we are to *stop* here. Whether we judge from *Reason* or *Analogy*, I presume we shall readily discover, that they whose Faith extends no farther than this can neither *become* nor *continue* true Members of the Church of *Christ*.—It is possible to *believe* the *Mission* of our Saviour, and at the same Time to *disbelieve* all his *Doctrines*: not only so, but to be utterly destitute of all the *Means* of better Information. That *Jesus* was a Prophet sent from God is a Doctrine acknowledged by the *Mahometans* themselves. And shall we then unite into *one Church* the Followers of *Mahomet*, and the Followers of *Christ*? No-
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thing can be imagined more absurd.—Let it then be considered, wherein this Absurdity consists? what it is that renders such an Union so apparently ridiculous and impracticable? The Answer to this Question will probably furnish us with the true Key for discovering the *precise* Quantity of Faith, which is *necessary* to constitute us *Christians*.

Now it seems to me that an Union in Religion presupposes a perfect Agreement with regard to the *Rule* of Faith and Manners. I do not mean that Persons of the *same* Religion may not follow Rules of *different Extent*: for in this respect there would be a manifest Disagreement between *Catholics* and *Protestants*. But I call that Agreement *perfect*, which is perfect *as far as it goes*: I mean, when the *intire* Rule of *either* Party is owned and professed by the *other*; only with the *Addition* of a Rule peculiar to itself. Thus the Romanists acknowledge the *Truth* of the *Scriptures*; tho' they *add* to it the Authority of *Tradition*, and the Infallibility of the *Church*. And had *Mahomet* also acknowledged the *Truth* and *Integrity* of the *Scriptures*, I will not affirm that his Pretence to a new Revelation would have disqualified him for the Church of *Christ*.—The Absurdity therefore above-mentioned results solely from hence, that the *Followers* of *Mahomet* are *Enemies* to the *Gospel*: and whoever agrees with them in that *one Point* may

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may with *equal* Reason be excluded the Church. So that besides a *general* Belief in *Christ*, a *particular* Acknowledgement of the *Truth* of the *New Testament* is an indispensable Condition of *Christian Communion*. Without this, our *Faith* in *Christ* would be utterly *vain* and *insignificant*.—Whether *this* Degree of Faith is to be esteemed *sufficient*, will be briefly considered afterwards : that *less* than this *cannot* be sufficient, appears, in some measure, from what has been already said. Let me only add, that to *believe* in *Christ*, and at the same time to deny the *Truth* of the *Scriptures*, is, properly speaking, to believe only this ; *That in Times past a Prophet was sent into the World, who taught certain Doctrines now unknown*. For *unknown* they are and must be, if the *Gospel* does not contain a faithful Account of them. Whether this Prophet was called *Socrates* or *Christ* ; whether he was put to Death at *Athens* or *Jerusalem* ; whether his Followers be long since *extinct*, or whether Numbers still *remain*, who affect to be called by his *Name* ; these Things are of no Consequence at all.—In short, to borrow an Expression of a Celebrated Author, such a Faith amounts only to this ; *That Somebody taught Something*. And whether this should be made the Principle of *Church Communion*, I leave our Adversaries to judge.

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IT seems then to be the Voice of *Reason*, that no Man should be *admitted* into the Christian Church, or suffered to *continue* in it; who is not ready to subscribe these two Propositions.

1. THAT Jesus was a *Teacher sent from God*.

2. THAT the Books of the New Testament contain a faithful Account of the *Doctrines* he taught.

So far is the Scripture from *contradicting* this Notion, that we may draw from thence an *Analogical* Argument, which will serve to strengthen and confirm it.—Whatever Degree of *Infidelity* was esteemed by the Apostles sufficient Ground for *excluding* Men from the Church, the opposite Degree of *Faith* is a *necessary* Qualification for Men's *Admission* to it, or *Continuance* in it. But it seems that all such Persons, as *knowingly* opposed the *Doctrines* of the *Apostles* were thought unworthy of Fellowship with the Church. Now what the Apostles *themselves* were to the first Christians, that the *Scriptures* are to us. What we cannot learn from their *Mouths*, we must learn from their *Pens*; and *Opposition* to their *Writings* is now the very same Thing, as *Opposition* to their *Persons* was formerly. For as to *various* *Lectiōs*, or supposed *Interpolations*, they do not seem of Consequence sufficient to affect the Rule here laid down.—

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The Conclusion is, that they who *oppose* the *Scriptures*, are utterly *disqualified* for *Church Communion*.

THAT nothing further was required of the first Converts, but simply to *believe* in *Christ*, is more *true* than *pertinent* : because the *Reason* of that Conduct does not now subsist.— They who had been convinced by our *Saviour's* Miracles, that *God was with him*, could not possibly doubt of the Truth of his *Doctrines* : and they who had the Happiness of a *personal Correspondence* might be sure of *knowing* what these *Doctrines* were. In like Manner the Preaching of the *Apostles* convinced and *instructed* at once : So that *Belief* and *Ignorance* were in a manner *incompatible* ; a Belief, I mean, of their Divine *Mission*, and an Ignorance of those fundamental *Doctrines* they were sent to teach in all the World. No wonder then that a *general* Belief was sufficient, when it unavoidably drew after it a full and particular Information.—But this is no Precedent for *us*. Because *our* Circumstances are widely *different*. A Man may now take upon him *the Name of Christ*, without knowing one Syllable of *Christianity* ; and therefore the Fact maintained by Mr. *Locke*, however true in itself, will afford no Shadow of Argument against *any* Ecclesiastical Constitution whatever ; much less against insisting
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on *that* Form of Communion for which I am here pleading.

BUT what shall we say to those Persons, who agree with us in a *Belief* of the Scriptures, but differ in the *Interpretation* of them? differ even in those Articles which appear to us of the greatest *Importance*?—I answer, 1st, It does not appear from *Scripture* that such Persons are to be excluded the *Church*. The Heretics, there mentioned, seem to have denied *those* Doctrines, which they *knew* to have been taught by the Apostles themselves. But that the Apostles would have excommunicated a Christian merely for *mistaking* their *Meaning*, does not appear from any Thing they have said. On the contrary it seems highly probable that they took Care to *rectify* all dangerous Mistakes, by explaining themselves more fully and more clearly in those Instances, where they had been misunderstood.—But then, 2^{dly}, I observe, that under a *Standing Revelation* the Advantage just mentioned is not to be had; and, of consequence, that we are now liable to a great Variety of Errors, which in the first Age of the Gospel could not possibly subsist. Our *Circumstances* therefore being so greatly *altered*, it is by no means to be presumed, *merely* from the Practice of the Apostles, that all possible Mistakes in interpreting Scripture are compatible with Church-Communion.—These two Observations taken together

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together shew, if I mistake not, that the New Testament itself has left this Matter altogether *undetermined*. I therefore observe, 3dly, That we are to be *solely* directed by the *Reason* of the Thing. Or in other Words thus; Whatever Terms of Communion best serve the *Ends* of Communion; whatever Terms most effectually promote the *Knowledge* and *Practise* of true Religion; these, and these only, ought to be made the Terms of *Christian Communion*.——If any Man require me to be yet more *particular*, I must answer as follows. No *single* Man ought to be denied the *Benefits* of *Communion*, unless the *Concession* of these Benefits redound to the *Damage* of the whole *Society*. No Christian Society, *spiritually* considered, does or can receive *Damage*, by the same Means which promote and confirm a right Understanding of the *Scriptures*. No Means are more effectual for this End, than a fair, and diligent, and impartial Inquiry. No Inquiry is so *likely* to deserve this Character, as that which is free from *Restraint*, of what Kind soever. And lastly, no Inquiry is free from *Restraint*, which is accompanied with the *Danger* of *Exclusion* from the *Church*.—I say nothing of Men's Admission to Offices of Power and Trust, whether *Civil* or *Ecclesiastical*. How far the *same* Method of Reasoning may be extended to *these* Cases, is a Point in which I
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am not concerned, and which I therefore leave to be determined by others. I speak only of the *general Terms of Christian Communion*. And, with regard to these, I am forced to conclude, in those celebrated Words of the great *Chillingworth*, that we *ought not to require more of any Man than this; to believe the Scripture to be God's Word, to endeavour to find out the true Sense of it, and to live according to it.*

I FIND I have been insensibly drawn into a Subject not *essential* to my present Design. —What was incumbent upon me to shew was only this.—1st, That the New Testament requires no other *Condition* of our entering into *Covenant with Christ*, and partaking in the Privileges of *his Church*, but that we *believe* in his *Name*: and, 2^{dly}, That this Condition is perfectly agreeable to Right Reason.—If *Reason* itself require *other Conditions*; this has no Relation to any Objections that can be brought against the Scripture Doctrine of the *Necessity of Faith*.

WE have hitherto considered Faith as a *previous Qualification*, without which we are not allowed to *enter* into the *Christian Church*, and to *take upon us* the *Christian Covenant*. We are now to consider it as belonging to the *Covenant itself*.——Let me here premise, That the Word *Covenant* signifies nothing
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more, in the *Scripture* Sense of it, but a *conditional Promise*, humbly *accepted* on our Part, of signal Favours from the Hand of God: That the *Favour* proposed, in the *Gospel* Covenant, is no other than *Eternal Life*: and lastly, that the *Condition* required is a *Compliance* with *those* Terms which our Saviour Christ has thought fit to *impose*. What these *are* must be known from his own Words: what they *are not*, may be known, in many Instances, from the Light of our own *Reason*.—That *Faith* in *some* Sense, is of the Number, no Man can doubt who believes the Gospel. In *what* Sense, and with *what* *Propriety*, is the Point we are now to examine.—And for this Purpose I can think of no readier Way, than immediately to produce that remarkable Passage, in which the indispensable Necessity of Faith is most clearly, and most expressly taught. I shall attempt to free it from those Interpretations, which appear to me absurd and irrational; to discover a different Interpretation, which may be agreeable to Reason; and lastly, to establish the *Truth* of it, and to prove that the very *Words* of our Saviour will bear no other without *Violence*.—When this is done, I see not what can be wanting to the rational Support of my *Third* and last Proposition.

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THE Passage itself runs thus, *He that believeth—shall be saved ; but he that believeth not, shall be damned.*

BEFORE I inquire particularly into the Meaning of these Words, I must observe, 1st, That *Salvation* is, in Effect, the very same Thing with *Remission of Sins* ; they only being *saved*, whose *Sins* are *forgiven*. 2^{dly}, That both these Expressions coincide with that other, of *entering into the Kingdom of Heaven*, or of *inheriting Eternal Life*. Thus we find (in Matth. xxv.) the blessed Sentence, *Enter into the Kingdom prepared for you* (which *Kingdom* appears from the Context to be *Life eternal*) is indiscriminately pronounced on all Those, who *escape Everlasting Condemnation*. The Scripture knows no *intermediate State* ; but places *all Mankind* on the *Right-Hand*, or on the *Left* : 3^{dly}, It follows from hence, that *every Person*, whose *Sins* are *forgiven*, will partake in the Grand *Benefit* annexed to the *Covenant* of the *Gospel*. And, 4^{thly}, That *all those*, who *fail* of obtaining *Gospel-Rewards*, must inevitably suffer *Gospel-Punishments*.

THIS being premised, we shall be better able to consider the various Interpretations of the Passage before us ; and to discover their Agreement or Disagreement with the Principles of Right Reason.

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NOW the first and most obvious Sense of the Words is this; *that all Believers shall be saved, and all Unbelievers damned, without any Exception or Restriction.*

BUT whatever be the Meaning of the Words in Question; this, we are sure, is *not* the Meaning.—If it were, we must suppose Men's final and irreverfible State to depend on a Qualification not in their own *Power*. For furely it is not in Men's Power to believe in a Gospel of which they have never *heard*; and how fmall a Proportion of the Inhabitants of this Globe, if we reckon from the *Creation* to the *prefent* Times, have ever heard the Name of *Chrift*? It would follow manifefly from this Suppofition, that the greater Part of Mankind came into the World without a *Poffibility* of avoiding Damnation. A Confequence highly injurious to the Wifdom and Goodnefs of Almighty God! An Affertion therefore, which neceffarily infers fuch a Confequence *could* not proceed from the Mouth of our Saviour.—From the fame Suppofition it would likewise follow that the moft flagrant *Sinners* were in a fafe Way to Salvation. For fuch Men are certainly to be found in the Number of thofe who *believe* in *Chrift*. But this alfo is repugnant to the Perfections of God, and therefore *could* not be affirmed by the *Son of God*.

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AGAIN, both the Parts of the Text, so interpreted, plainly contradict *other* Texts: those, I mean, which make *Holiness* a necessary Qualification for *Heaven*; and those which represent God's *Goodness* as without *Limits*, and without *Partiality*. But the Scripture cannot contradict itself; and therefore our Saviour *could* not mean what this Interpretation supposes.

LASTLY, If we consider the Words themselves, we shall find them plainly *referring* to the *preceding* Verse. But the preceding Verse *requires* a Restriction. For, in an *unrestrained* and *literal* Sense, the Apostles neither did nor could *preach the Gospel to every Creature*. The following Verse therefore may on this *single* Account be justly confined to those Persons, among whom the Gospel was *actually* preached. Whoever extends it further than *this*, extends it further than the Words will bear.

A 2d Interpretation is this, That they who believe and *obey* the Gospel, are intitled to God's *covenanted* Blessings; but that *all* Unbelievers, whether *before* or *since* the Coming of Christ, whether *virtuous* or *vicious*, will be intirely *excluded*. To guard against the Difficulties of the *last* Interpretation, the Defenders of *this* are not unwilling to grant, that possibly some *lower* Degrees of Favour,

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some *unknown* and *uncovenanted* Mercies may be finally reserved for good *Heathens*.—According to which Notion *Faith* in *Christ* is, in a strict and *literal* Sense, an indispensable Condition of the *Gospel-Covenant*.

BUT neither is this a *true* Interpretation. If we attend to *Reason*, we shall never be brought to believe, that God should promise and bestow *peculiar Favour*, on any other Ground than *peculiar Virtue*. Christians therefore cannot be *happier*, unless *better* than other Men. And, notwithstanding what has been observed under the 2d Head, yet it seems very improbable that the *wisest* Heathen, supposing him *equally* well-disposed, should fall short in Perfection of the *meanest* Christian.—Let it not be said that Christians shall be favoured on Account of their *Relation* to *Jesus Christ*; since a causeless Deviation from the Rule of *Distributive Justice*, is what neither He could *ask*, nor God *bestow*.——Notwithstanding the Prevalence of a contrary Opinion, it seems to me *most* evident that *Revelation* asserts the very same Thing. For thus I argue—The Title of a *Christian* to *covenanted* Blessings solely arises from the *Covenant* itself; from the express *Promise* of Almighty God. If then this Promise extend to *Unbelievers*, *they* too have a *Covenant Right*. But now this Promise extends to all those, who obtain
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Forgiveness of Sins through the *Blood of Christ*. If then it be true that Christ died for *all Men*, the Promise must be understood without *Restriction*; without any *other* Restriction, than what necessarily arises from the very Nature of the Thing: which indeed amounts only to this, that Christ died, not to *save* Mankind, but to put them in a *Capacity* of saving *themselves*; I mean to procure them an Insurance of *Pardon*, on Condition of their sincere *Repentance*. Less, I think, cannot be understood by the *Universality* of our Redemption, than that all Mankind have it in their *Power* to obtain Salvation thro' Christ*.

—But if any Person shall still maintain, that the Promise of Eternal Life belongs only to *Christians*, I desire him to consider these Words of St. Paul (1 Tim. iv. 10.) —*who is the Saviour of all Men, especially of those that believe*. Dr. Whitby, with great Reason, rejects the Opinion of those Persons, who confined this *Salvation* to Deliverance from *Temporal* Dangers: since it cannot but refer to that *faithful Saying*, contained in the 8th Verse; *Godliness is profitable unto all Things; having Promise of the Life which now is, and of that which is to come*. We have then a plain Text, in which the Blessings of a Fu-

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* See 1 John ii. 2. with numberless others to the same Purpose.

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ture Life, though more especially belonging to *those that believe*, are yet, in *some Degree*, promised to *all Men*.—It will be of no Consequence to allege, that none but *Christians* have actually *embraced* the Promises of God, and *accepted* the Covenant proposed to them: since this, we find, was not necessary, even with respect to the *Jewish Covenant*. *If the Uncircumcision keep the Righteousness* (that is, the *Moral Part*) of the Law, *shall not his Uncircumcision be counted for Circumcision?* (Rom. ii. 26.) How much more if he who is *unbaptized* keep the Righteousness of the *Christian Law*, shall his *Want of Baptism* be counted for *Baptism*? Whoever considers the *Analogy* between Circumcision and Baptism, will be forced to allow the two Arguments to be alike conclusive, or alike inconclusive. If the *former* prove the Title of the *Gentiles* to the Privileges of the *Jewish Covenant*; the *latter* will prove the Title of *Heathens* to the Privileges of the *Christian Covenant*: supposing, in *both Cases*, that they who *have not the Law*, do by *Nature* the Things contained in the Law. In short the true State of the Case is only this: that *not the Hearers*, or Believers, of the Law (whether *Jewish* or *Christian*,) but the *Doers of it* are justified before God.—One Argument remains, which I hope will be decisive. I have already observed, that

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that *Forgiveness* of Sins, or an intire *Exemption* from Future *Penalties*, is, in the Scripture Language, stiled *Salvation*: and that this *Salvation* is inseparably connected with our *Admission* to Christ's *heavenly Kingdom*, and our *Participation* of *Eternal Life*. If therefore we are sure from Reason and Scripture, that honest *Heathens* shall escape *the Wrath to come*, which, I think, is generally admitted by *Protestant* Writers; it follows that they are *included* in those Words of our Saviour, (Matth. xxv. last Verse) *the Righteous shall go into Life eternal*. Nothing is clearer, than that the grand Division, represented to us in this Chapter, takes in our *whole Species*. They who are *not* placed on the *Left Hand* will be placed on the *Right*; and they, who are placed on the *Right*, are here called *righteous*. If therefore there be *any* Heathen, who escapes *Everlasting Punishment*, he will then be *numbered* among the *righteous*; and if so, he has, by Virtue of our Saviour's *Promise*, a *Covenant Right* to *Eternal Life*.—That the *Covenant* is *conditional* is most certain: were it otherwise, it could not be *called* a *Covenant*. But to say that *actual* Belief in Christ is, *literally* speaking, an *essential* Condition, is to make the *Salvation* of more than half Mankind altogether *impossible*.—I am sensible that Endeavours have been used to confine the
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Gospel-Representations of a Future Judgment to the *Believing World*: but surely in vain; unless *Tyrians* and *Sidonians*, *Ninevites* and *Sodomites* can be considered as *Believers*. For these are all expressly numbered by our Saviour himself, among those who are to be *judged* by him at the *great Day*. We hear indeed of the Prophets *preaching* to some of them; but that *Preaching* manifestly means nothing more, than a Denunciation of God's Wrath against those Nations for their great Wickedness and grievous Enormities. Not the least Expectation, as far as appears, was either given them, or conceived by them, of a *Saviour* to come.

I CONCLUDE, upon the whole, that an honest Heathen has the *same* Title to Salvation, which we *our selves* have; with this *only* Difference, that he *knows* it *not*. If on *this* Account it be *improper* to say God has *promised* him Salvation; yet his Right is equally strong in itself: being founded on the *express* Declarations of him who *cannot* lye. To *whom* these Declarations were made, is, I presume, of no Consequence.

BUT though it be allowed that Good Heathens have a sure *Title* to *Eternal Happiness*; yet will not the Happiness of *Christians* be greatly *superior*? Will not *signal* Privileges, and *extraordinary* Favours be conferred on
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faithful *Believers*? I answer, *that* will depend on their *Moral Goodness*. If they make a right *Use* of the Advantages they enjoy, I have not only *acknowledged*, but *maintained*; that their *Faith* will increase their *Virtue*, and their *Virtue* improve their *Happiness*. But that they shall be honoured with *peculiar Privileges*, merely because they *happen* to be *Christians*, without Regard to their *Moral Improvements*; is a Doctrine, as I apprehend, *unsupported by Scripture*, and directly *opposite to Right Reason*. Sure I am, the Passage in Question admits of no such Interpretation. The Word *Damnation* cannot possibly signify *such* an Exclusion from the Privileges of the Gospel, as neither *supposes* Blame, nor *infers* Punishment. On the contrary it does and must import the *Sentence* to be pronounced on *Evil Doers*: since he who is *innocent* cannot be *condemned*.

ACCORDING to a 3^d Interpretation the Words in the latter Part of the Verse are to be taken *literally* as far as they *reach*; but then they are to be *restrained* to those *Persons*, among whom the Gospel has been *actually* preached. This indeed will be more suitable to the *Context*, than either of the former.—But still the *main Difficulty* remains. The Condemnation of *all Unbelievers*, even in this *narrower* Sense of the Word, will not easily

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easily be reconciled with the *Perfections* of God. For may not a fair and candid Inquirer, desirous and resolved to do his Duty, unhappily determine, without his own Fault, on the *wrong* Side of the Question? May he not want *Capacity* to see, or *Leisure* to examine as he ought the Evidences of Revealed Religion? May not his Mind have taken a wrong *Tincture*, from an early Infusion of erroneous Opinions? May not the *Authority* of Friends and Parents have thrown insurmountable Obstacles in his Way, to prevent him from coming at the *Truth*? And may not the whole Course of his *Conversation* have lain among *Enemies* to the *Faith*? Concerning the *Frequency* of these Cases I pretend not to determine. I fear the general Conduct of *modern* Deists will not suffer us to be very *sanguine* in Expectations or Assertions of that Nature. But surely the Thing is not *impossible*.—Not only at the first Appearance of Christianity, but even in our own Times, it is easy to *conceive* such Circumstances, in which *Infidelity* would be *no Crime*.—This I doubt not will be *denied*, as it often *has* been denied, by those Men who have a *Zeal for Christ*, but not according to *Knowledge*. Let such Persons be pleased to consider the great Differences among Christians themselves, in regard to the *Proofs* of their Religion; what
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Variety of Opinions subsist among them concerning the Validity of *every* Kind of Argument, that of *Miracles* not accepted; and let them learn from thence that it is *possible* at least for *Good Men* not to see, what *Good Christians* have sought for in *vain*. If a Man may honestly refuse Assent to *one* Kind of Proof; if *different Men*, without Suspicion of Blame, may deny the Force of *different* Proofs; and *no* Proof seems conclusive to *all*: why may not an *Infidel* be *sincere*, who only happens to *unite* the various Opinions of Men *confessedly* honest?—I hope it will not be answered by any Christian, that no Man can possibly be saved, unless he sees the Force of those *very* Arguments, which have proved sufficient to convince *Him*.

IF then I may be allowed to suppose an *honest* Infidel, I must suppose a Case to which this *Damnatory* Sentence *cannot* extend. For *unavoidable* Ignorance, wherever it exists, cannot be obnoxious to *Blame* or *Punishment*. It is to all Intents and Purposes the very same Thing, whether Men have never *heard* of Christ; or have received no *Evidence* of his Divine Mission; or have received an Evidence, which, tho' conclusive to *others*, is to *them* of *no Force*. In *all* these Cases their Plea is still the *same*; it is impossible that the
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single Circumstance of Ignorance or Unbelief, a Circumstance out of their own Power, and not depending on their Wills, should expose them to Everlasting Punishment. And if not, I apprehend it has been already shewn, that they have a Federal Right to Life Eternal.

BUT if these Interpretations are all to be rejected; how can we vindicate our former Assertion, That *Faith in Christ* is a *necessary Condition of the Gospel Covenant*? or how is it possible to explain our Saviour's Words *consistently* with the *Notions* I have been maintaining?—I answer by producing a

4th Interpretation; which, though I do not apprehend it to be the *true Sense* of the *Words*, will yet well deserve to be considered; because it contains a Doctrine no way repugnant to *Reason*, and a *sufficient Answer* to the Question. The Interpretation I mean confines the latter Part of the Verse to those who enjoy sufficient *Evidence*, and sufficient *Capacity* to discern it; and in *these* Persons Faith is strictly *necessary*.—The *undoubted Terms* of the Christian Covenant are *Repentance* and *Amendment of Life*: Amendment not in *one* or a *few* Instances, but in *all* Points of Duty, where we have been *deficient*. So that this Condition evidently comprehends *every Branch of Moral Virtue*: and if *Faith* itself be a real *Virtue*, it is a real *Condition* of our Salvation.
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—But what shall we say to those Men, by whom this Virtue is *unattainable*? Do they therefore *forfeit* their Right to Salvation? By no Means. *If there be first a willing Mind; it is accepted according to what a Man hath, and not according to what he hath not.* He who is sincerely desirous to know and perform his Duty, can never *fail* of Acceptance with God, on account of *unavoidable* Defects, of what Kind soever.

BUT does not our Saviour affirm *universally*, without giving the least Hint of such an Indulgence? He does so: and would certainly have done the very same, had he been speaking of any *other* Moral Virtue. But it is well known, and universall agreed, that the Extent of Men's *Duty* is greatly different, when considered *materially*, and *formally*. And the very *same* Distinction is certainly to be applied to the *Conditions* of our *Salvation*. If we consider them, as they are in *themselves*; *Faith* is and ought to be a *General Condition*: but if *relatively* to the Capacities of particular Persons; the Proposition then amounts only to this, That, proper Means and Opportunities *supposed*, a Defect of *Faith* is a Defect of *Virtue*, and *therefore* destructive to our *Salvation*. In other Words, a *wilful Neglect* of examining Revealed Religion, or a *corrupt* and *partial* Examination, *will* be punished, because it *deserves*

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serves to be punished. It is our Duty, and our Interest, to *obey the Divine Will*. But we *cannot* obey it, unless we *know* it; and we *cannot* know it, if we neglect the *Means*, which God himself has put into our Power.— In *this* Sense therefore *Faith* in *Christ* is a necessary Condition of the Gospel-Covenant; and there is, I believe, no *one* Virtue, which can be said to be necessary in any *other* Sense. The *formal* Necessity of *any* Condition whatever will *always* depend on the *Abilities* of the *Agent*.

AND yet this Sense, however *reasonable*, cannot, I think, be the *true* Sense of the Passage we have been so long considering. My Reason is, because, on this Supposition, the two *similar* Clauses in this Verse would not *correspond* to each other; both of them would be understood with a *Restriction*, but the Restrictions would be extremely *different*. For thus it would run—*Believers* shall be *saved*, if they act up to their Principles; *Unbelievers* shall be *damm'd*, if—what? if their Unbelief is owing to Negligence and Partiality. This appears to me *quite* unnatural. I shall therefore propose a

5th Interpretation, to which I am led by this very Reflection.—It is in short only this. They who *believe* not the Gospel, are not *likely* to obey it's *Laws*; and they who *obey* not

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not it's Laws, *cannot* be *saved*. I am forced to suppose the *Necessity* of *Faith*, here intended by our Saviour, to be not a *literal*, not an *hypothetical*, but a *figurative* *Necessity*; implying nothing more than it's great *Importance*.—I am very sensible this Interpretation will appear to *many* Persons a most unwarrantable *Violence* on the plain Words of Scripture. To *me* it appears *natural*, and *unavoidable*. The Reasons, *why* it appears so, I am now to produce.

IT is very usual, in common Speech, to consider *Difficulties* as *Impossibilities*: and the greater the Difficulty of which we are speaking, the *more natural* is this Expression. Strictly speaking, nothing is *impossible* but *Contradictions*: and yet it is manifest, at first Sight, that, when we pronounce a Thing impossible, we seldom intend to affirm it in *this* Sense; we only mean to say that it is *highly* improbable; we only mean a *moral*, that is, a *figurative* Impossibility.

Now we have already shewn that Unbelievers are in great *Danger* of falling short of Salvation. We have shewn this, on Supposition that *Reason* was cultivated and improved in the best Manner. Both the *Motives* she proposes, and the *Means* she offers, are incomparably *inferior* to those of *Revelation*; and yet even *these*, great as they are, are found

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in *Fact*, far from sufficient to reclaim the *Generality* of Mankind. It would not therefore have been strange, if our Saviour had said, That without Faith in Him *no Man* can be saved. We should only have understood him in the same *qualified* Sense, as when he tells us, on another Occasion, That *it is easier for a Camel to go through the Eye of a Needle, than for a rich Man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven*. Every one may perceive that such *general* Expressions ought not to be *tied down* to the *literal* Sense; but always interpreted with *such* Restrictions, as the *Reason* of the Case suggests to us.—But this is not all: for in the *present* Instance the Context itself will not allow us to understand our Saviour without a *further* Limitation. Had he affirmed in general, That *all* Unbelievers are in a doubtful and dangerous State, he had only affirmed a *certain* Truth. But his Words do not imply even thus much. They were certainly spoken with a *peculiar* Regard to the *actual* State of the World at *that* Time; and to the very Persons who received the Gospel from the Hands of the *Apostles themselves*. And in this View the *Figure* is yet more *natural*, because the Danger was yet *greater*; because the *Improbability* of such Men's Salvation was without Question *exceeding* great. If this *supernatural* Message, to call them to Repen-

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tance, failed of producing it's *due Effect*; what *other Means* could ever reclaim them? Or how could it be expected that *weaker Means* should be sufficient, when *stronger* had been used to no Purpose?—In this *Respect*, and on this *Account*, our Saviour might surely affirm, *that he who believeth not, shall be damned.*

To make this Interpretation still more easy, let it be farther considered, that these *Effects* of *Infidelity* are not to be estimated by the *Event*, but by it's natural *Tendency*. To disbelieve the Christian Religion is in *itself* a *Means* of *Ruin*; however this *Ruin* may by *other Means* be prevented. On *this Account* therefore we cannot wonder that *Infidelity* is here considered as the *Ground* and *Reason* of our *Condemnation*.

FROM what has been said, I imagine, it sufficiently appears, that this *Explication* is not *unnatural*. But that it is a *true Explication*, remains yet to be shewn.—And surely it is *some* *Presumption* in it's Favour, that it is both agreeable to *Reason*, and to *other Passages* in *Holy Scripture*. I shall not waste Time in proving the *former*: the *latter* may perhaps be thought less evident. But, not to insist on the repeated Declarations, that *virtuous Men*, of all *Ages* and *Nations*, shall be *favoured of God*, and rewarded by him; that

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he is no *Respecter of Persons*, but good to all; and that *Heaven* and *Hell* shall finally be adjudged according to Men's good or evil *Doings*: not to insist on all this, I desire it may be observed, that, in those Places where *Infidelity* is most strongly condemned, it is almost always joined with *Impenitence*, and supposed to be inseparably connected. I shall only mention one Instance, because it is very remarkable. When our Saviour reproves the Unbelief of some of the principal Cities of *Judæa*, and threatens them with the dire Effects of it, he particularly compares *their Case* with that of the City *Nineveh*, and affirms the latter to be greatly preferable. What now is the *Reason* of this Preference? *They*, says *He*, *repented at the Preaching of Jonah*, and behold a greater than *Jonah* is here. The Sentence is in some Degree *Elliptical*: but the *Meaning* admits of no Dispute. The *Jews* were more blameable than the *Ninevites*; because the latter repented upon the Preaching of *Jonah*, the former did not repent upon the Preaching of *Christ*. It is not then *Infidelity* as such, but taken in Conjunction with it's natural Attendants, *Impenitence* and *Immorality*, to which so dreadful a Portion is allotted in the Life to come.

STILL we have defended our Interpretation from *Conjecture* only; let us at length examine

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mine the *Words themselves*.—*He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved: i. e. To embrace the Christian Religion is the natural Means of obtaining Salvation.* Our Saviour did not, and *could* not intend that *all* Believers would be *saved*: but that *Faith in Him* put them into the *Way* of Salvation; that *Faith naturally* tended to make them *holy* here, and *happy* hereafter. For that in the *Event* it would certainly and *infallibly* save them, this could by no Means be supposed; because our Saviour knew perfectly well, that many of his Followers would be deficient in *Virtue*; and without *Virtue* there is *no Salvation*.—Whoever maintains that this Part of the *Text* is to be understood *universally*, without *any* Exception, will be forced to include under the Word *Faith* the *whole* Idea of *Evangelical Obedience*. And if any Person chuse *this* Way of interpreting, it comes, in Effect, to the *same* Thing. One or the other, I think, is constantly acknowledged by all *rational* Christians.—Now if the *former* Part of the Verse is to be thus understood, the *latter* Part, which exactly *corresponds* to it, is certainly to be interpreted in a *like* Manner. *He that believeth not, shall be damned: i. e. To reject the Christian Religion is the natural Means of Condemnation.* Not that *all* Unbelievers shall be condemned; but that Infidelity

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naturally tends to obstruct Men's Improvements in *Virtue*, and by *that* Means to hinder their *Salvation*. Our Saviour might *possibly* foresee, that some *few* among the *Rejectors* of Christianity would, in the *Event*, be *good Men*; and a Good Man cannot be condemned. He might know, that *many* of the *Heathens*, both before and after his Appearance in the World, had done *all* that a *Good God* could ever require at their *Hands*. But he *also* knew that their Proficiency in *Virtue* was owing to *other* Causes than *Ignorance* or *Infidelity*; which, considered in *themselves*, have, in all *possible* Cases, a very *bad* and *pernicious* Tendency.—Either this is the true Meaning, or the Word *Infidelity* must take in *Disobedience to the Laws of the Gospel*. Which seems to me *less* natural. But it makes no Difference upon the whole, whether we *extend* the Sense of this Word, or *restrain* the Sense of the *general Assertion*. What I contend for is only this, that *both* Parts of the Text should be treated *alike*. I think it highly unreasonable to *put in* Exceptions to the *former* Part, and to *deny* these Exceptions to the *latter*. The *Form* of the two *Clauses* is exactly the *same*: and the *Reason* of the *Thing* is the same *also*. If *Faith* may fail of making Men *virtuous*, *Infidelity* may fail of making them *vicious*. If in the former Case Believers

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lievers cannot be *saved*; in the latter Unbelievers cannot be *damned*.—Nay the Interpretation of the *latter* Clause is, of the two, *less forced*: because the *Exceptions*, I fear, are *less numerous*. It is not for us to determine the Number; but we cannot help judging it probable that *vicious* Christians are *far* more, in Proportion, than *virtuous* Heathens.—I conclude upon the whole that the true and intire Meaning of our Saviour's Words is no other than this. *He that believeth, and is baptized, becomes intituled to my Kingdom, because qualified for it. He is excited to his Duty by the strongest Motives, and supported in it by the most powerful Assistance; and is therefore, on both Accounts, in the high Road to Happiness and Salvation.*—But *he that believeth not*, having rejected those *Means*, and that *Mediator*, by which alone he can be *saved*; will still continue under the *Dominion of Sin*, and thereby fall into *Condemnation*.

I WOULD endeavour to *contract* the Doctrine maintained, under *this* and the *preceding* Interpretation, that it may appear to the Reader at *one View*.—*Faith* then may justly be considered as a *necessary Condition of the Gospel-Covenant* in these two Respects: either 1st, As it naturally *follows*, or 2^{dly}, As it naturally *produces* EVANGELICAL OBEDIENCE. It was *peculiarly necessary* in those Persons, whether

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ther *Jews* or *Gentiles*, to whom the Gospel was *actually* preached by the Apostles *themselves*: since *their* Infidelity was both a stronger *Presumption*, and a more probable *Means* of *Bad Conduct*. It was a stronger *Presumption*, on Account of the superior Strength of the *Evidence* which was then granted; it was a more probable *Means* of bad Conduct, on Account of the *lost* and *deplorable* Condition of almost the *whole* World, at the Time of our Saviour's Appearance in it. When Idolatry and Immorality were become in a Manner *universal*, *Belief* in *Christ* was the *only* Way left, for the *Recovery* and *Salvation* of Mankind. Whoever therefore *rejected* this, unavoidably *continued* in a State of *Condemnation*.—It was at *all* Times true, that, *if they who had not the Gospel, did by Nature the Things contained in the Gospel*, they had a sure Title to *Gospel Rewards*. But as Things were *then* circumstanced, they who refused to own the *Mission* of our Saviour, had no *Chance* for *obeying* the *Laws* of his Kingdom. And they who disobeyed the *Laws* of his Kingdom, could have *no Claim* to *Eternal Life*.—*Faith* then and *Obedience* being so closely *connected*, the *Necessity* of the former immediately results from the *Necessity* of the latter.

THE Reader will observe, that I have thus far confined my self to a general Belief of
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Christ's Mission. If it be asked, how far the Belief of *particular* Articles may be esteemed a *necessary* Condition? I answer, just as far, as Men's *Capacities* and *Opportunities* extend. If a Belief in *Christ* be not *literally* and *universally* necessary, much less a Belief of any *single* Doctrine. I know it has been generally supposed by *Protestant* Writers, that there are in the Gospel a few *plain* Things, the Belief of which is *indispensably* required of every Christian. But should it not be considered, that what is plain to *some*, is *not* plain to *others*? and that hardly *any* Thing is plain to *all*? It *cannot* indeed be imagined, that a sincere Christian should misunderstand *every* Thing in the New Testament: it can *hardly* be imagined that he should be *generally* mistaken. But it does not follow, that, because we all believe *some* Part, or even the *greater* Part of the Doctrines of *Christ*, we must therefore believe the *very same* Doctrines. What is *hid* from one Man, may be *known* to another; and yet this *latter* shall be *ignorant*, in his Turn, of what is *most obvious* to the former. These *Inequalities* and *Varieties* of Judgment, may either be owing to *Constitution*, or to *Education*, or to Men's peculiar *Circumstances* and *Situation* in Life. But whatever be the *Cause* of them, of this we are very sure, that they cannot *possibly* endanger our Eter-

nal Happiness. Let us but honestly endeavour to believe and obey, in Proportion to our respective Abilities, and our Condition must be secure.—On the other Hand, it is equally a Mistake, to suppose that no religious Doctrines, except those which are peculiarly called *practical*, can be of any considerable Importance to Mankind. It cannot surely be thought that God would reveal any Doctrine to his Creatures, merely for Amusement and Speculation. Whatever He thinks fit to teach, it is our Duty and our Interest to learn. Nor is it possible to name any one Proposition made known to us by Christ and his Apostles, the Belief of which may not be greatly beneficial, and either directly or indirectly influence our Practice.

UPON the whole, I have endeavoured to shew that, notwithstanding different Appearances, the Scripture Doctrine of Faith is only this; That it springs from virtuous Dispositions of Mind, and gives Birth to others of the same Sort; That it is a great and excellent Means of preserving us in our Allegiance to God, and improving us in true Virtue; that, by this means, it secures our Title to a happy Eternity, and renders that Eternity still more happy.—On the other Hand Infidelity may indeed be innocent,

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cent, but it is alway *dangerous*. It robs *Virtue* of it's firmest *Supports*, and divests *Vice* of it's greatest *Terrors*. Hence it *naturally* and *frequently* happens, that Men fall into *Captivity to the Law of Sin*; and thereby *utterly* forfeit the glorious *Liberty of the Children of God*.

F I N I S.



